

Oman

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# SUMMARY REPORT



SULTANATE OF OMAN  
MINISTRY OF EDUCATION



THE WORLD BANK

# Education in Oman

# The Drive for Quality

Jointly prepared by The Ministry of Education and The World Bank

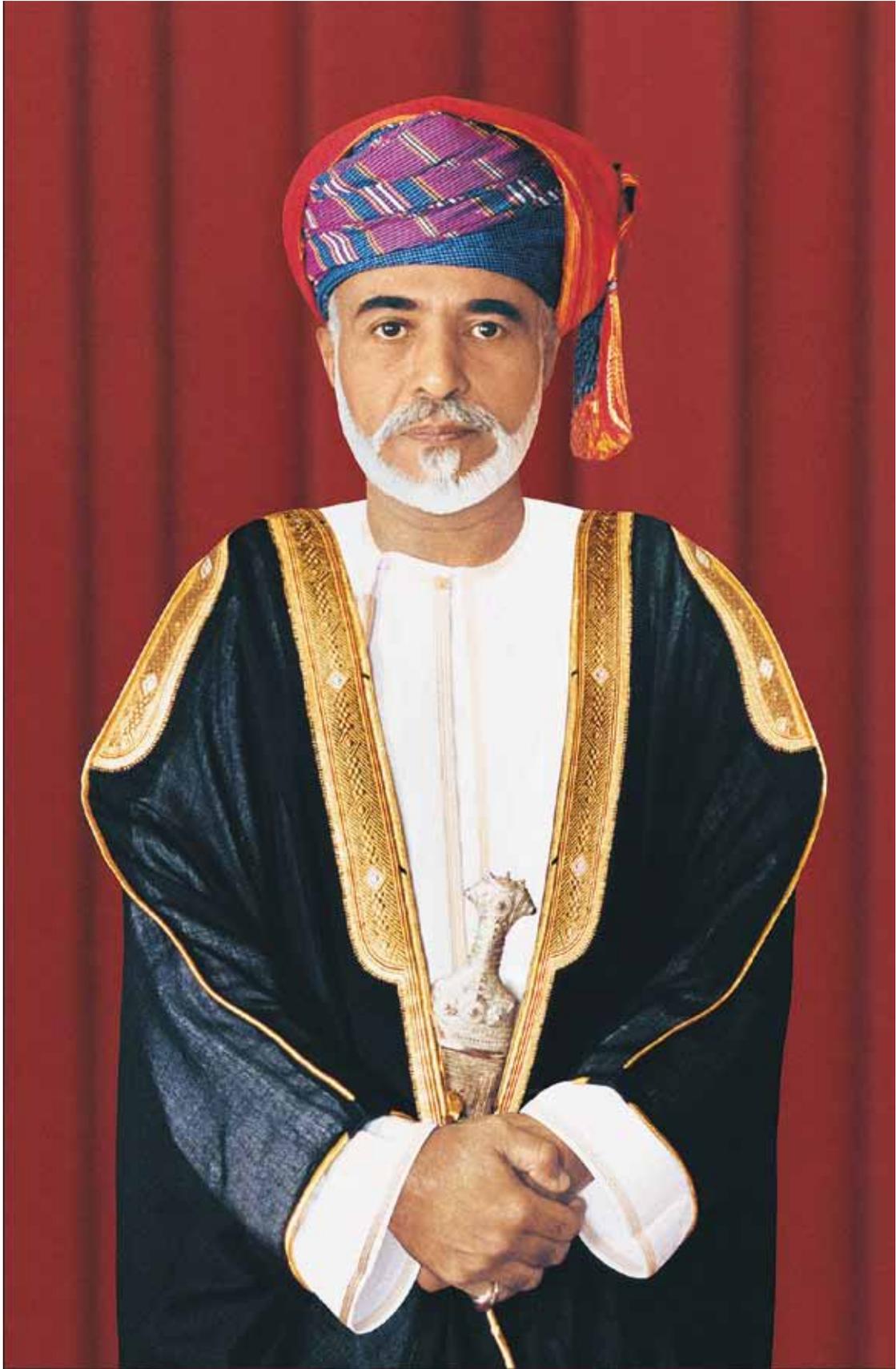
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Foreword of  
Her Excellency  
the Minister of  
Education





When His Majesty Sultan Qaboos ascended to the throne in 1970, one of the first commitments of his Government was to develop a public education system that would reach all parts of the country and would include all sections of society. At that time, there were only three schools in the whole of the Sultanate of Oman, all of them at the primary level and all for boys. To all intents and purposes, therefore, the country was starting with what was virtually a clean slate in terms of comprehensive educational provision.

With very low enrollment rates, the early focus of the Ministry of Education centered on issues related to access. The clear priorities of the country were to build the required educational infrastructure; to conduct a teacher recruitment program, mainly from abroad; and to develop a curriculum. The aims were to provide universal primary education, to expand provision to elementary and secondary education, and to promote gender equality.

Within a period of 40 years, the situation has been completely transformed. In 2008, there were nearly 1,300 schools in the country, providing education from grades 1 to 12 for over 600,000 students, 48 percent of whom were female. There were over 43,000 teachers, of which 89 percent were Omani. Education participation levels in Oman are now equal to or above those observed in other Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries.

The last 40 years has been a period of unprecedented development in the Sultanate, not only in education, but also economically and socially. The country is pursuing a development plan that focuses on economic diversification as a way of reducing its dependency on the oil sector. In addition, globalization of the world economy has brought its own strains, challenges and opportunities.

These developments, coupled with the Government's policy to "Omanize" the workforce, have meant that the country's needs in terms of education have dramatically changed. To prosper in the global marketplace, the Sultanate requires an education system that can produce future employees who can engage in analytical thinking and problem solving and who are creative, adaptable and competitive.

In response to these demands, the attention of the Ministry of Education in recent years has shifted away from concerns about access (since 97 percent of basic school-age Omanis are enrolled in schooling) towards attempts to qualitatively improve and increase the relevance of the education system so as to prepare our students to meet the challenges of a knowledge-based economy. The Ministry of Education is presently engaged in a number of major reform initiatives across the whole system. A new basic education system designed to provide a unified program for grades 1 to 10 was introduced in 1998, and a new post-basic education system organized on a "core plus electives" model for grades 11 and 12 was introduced in 2007. The reforms emphasize changing teaching, learning and assessment methodologies, updating the curriculum, adding new resources, improving facilities, reducing class sizes and upgrading the qualifications and skills of teachers.

However, there are still persistent issues concerning the quality of student achievement that need to be addressed. The Government of Oman invited the World Bank to collaborate with the Ministry of Education to undertake a study of the school education sector to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the present system and to provide recommendations for future improvement. On behalf of the Ministry of Education, I would like to thank the World Bank for its considerable efforts and expertise in producing such a comprehensive and valuable report. I would also like to express my appreciation to all those within the Ministry of Education whose assistance to the World Bank team helped to improve the relevance and quality of the report. I am confident that the report prove to be of considerable benefit to the Sultanate in helping it to improve its educational system in terms of access, equity, quality and efficiency. We are grateful for the continued fruitful collaboration and support offered by the World Bank and, as always, we are deeply appreciative of its contribution.

With the strong political will and commitment of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos and his Government to the country's educational development, we believe we can successfully prepare our citizens for the great challenges facing our nation through our mission to provide them all with an Education of Quality and Excellence. In light of this, the report will undoubtedly be instrumental in helping us to design future successful educational policies and strategies.

**Madiha Ahmed Al-Shaibani**

Minister of Education  
Sultanate of Oman









# CONTENTS

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Acknowledgements .....	11
Acronyms .....	13
<b>Overview .....</b>	<b>15</b>
Key Findings .....	15
<b>Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality</b>	
<b>Summary .....</b>	<b>21</b>
Report's Objectives and Coverage .....	23
Background .....	23
Progress and Achievements in Education .....	25
Major Challenges for Education .....	29
The Way Forward .....	37
Conclusion .....	43
<b>Appendix 1</b>	
<b>Matrix of Policy Recommendations</b>	
<b>for the Ministry of Education (MOE) .....</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>References .....</b>	<b>55</b>





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## ACRONYMS

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CA	Continuous assessment
CDD	Curriculum Development Directorate
ECE	Early childhood education
EFA	Education for All
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
GER	Gross enrollment ratio
HEI	Higher education institution
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOF	Ministry of Finance
MOH	Ministry of Health
MOHE	Ministry of Higher Education
MOM	Ministry of Manpower
MONTE	Ministry of National Economy
MOSD	Ministry of Social Development
MTEF	Medium-term expenditure framework
NCGC	National Career Guidance Center
NGF	National qualifications framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PETS	Public expenditure tracking survey
RO	Omani Riyal
STR	Student-teacher ratio
SQU	Sultan Qaboos University
EED	Educational Evaluation Directorate
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
VTC	Vocational training center





## OVERVIEW

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Since the 1970s, public education provision in Oman has flourished. Almost all Omani children of basic education age are now enrolled in schools, along with a high proportion (86 percent) of those of post-basic education age. The Government of Oman has turned its attention to ensuring that the achievements made to date are not only maintained but also further enhanced to achieve a high-quality, efficient and relevant education system. This report is the result of an education sector study undertaken collaboratively by the Government of Oman and the World Bank to analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the system and to provide recommendations to continue to improve education outcomes in Oman.

Drawing on evidence and information from a wide variety of sources, this report concentrates on pretertiary education and examines aspects of access to education, quality of learning, teachers and teaching methods, relevance of education to the labor market, and the financing and management of the education system. The report offers some policy recommendations on the way forward. A summary of the report's key findings follows.

## KEY FINDINGS

Oman's recent successes in expanding education provision are impressive. School enrollments have grown from 900 in 1970 to over 600,000 in 2008/09, and repetition and dropout rates have decreased considerably. The result is that education participation levels in Oman are equal to or above other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA). In particular, young women in Oman have high levels of tertiary education completion similar to levels in top performing countries, such as Singapore and South Korea. The Government has now moved its focus to the quality and relevance of teaching and learning. The results of the analysis from this education sector study confirm that the key challenge facing the education sector in Oman is to improve the quality of student learning outcomes and that enhancing quality should be the Government's main priority in education. Recent endeavors to improve quality include the introduction of revised systems of basic education (grades 1–10) and post-basic education (grades 11–12). While these initiatives are still new and their results will not be entirely apparent for several years, recent national and international assessments of learning achievement highlight the need for a concerted effort to improve quality.

There are many factors that influence the quality of educational outcomes. The Ministry of Education (MOE), in particular, has a central role to play in optimizing education system performance. There are two broad priorities suggested by this report: (1) creating a culture of high standards; and (2) developing the pedagogical capacity of the teaching force. These priorities, along with policy recommendations, are outlined as follows.

## Establish a Culture of High Standards

### Current Situation:

From young children's work in the classroom to teachers and administrators and beyond schools to the home environment, high standards of performance and learning should be expected. A disconnect was observed between the perception of learning achievement among students, teachers and parents and the students' actual learning achievement. National and international assessments of learning show that students are performing below the Government's expectations and below many countries in the world. In particular, the underachievement of boys is striking: of all 48 participating countries in the 2007 Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2007), Oman had the largest gender difference with boys scoring significantly lower than girls in all content areas. The amount of actual time spent on learning activities in Oman's public schools is less than in many other countries. School graduates lack some critical skills, particularly in English, which necessitates a foundation year in higher education institutions. In addition, employers express concerns about the job readiness of graduates. For Oman's education system to continue to improve, standards need to be raised and measures put in place to ensure that these new standards are met.

### Specific Areas to Address:

- To increase the time students spend on meaningful learning tasks, it will be important to meet the official target of 180 days in the school year, which is close to international norms. Currently days are lost due to examinations, special events and other closures. Reducing the grade 12 examinations to one session at the end of the year and keeping classes for grades 1–11 operating as usual during these examinations would help to meet the target. In addition, schools could be asked to extend the term to make up days lost for festivals or other reasons. Furthermore, teachers should be encouraged to prioritize the curriculum over other activities.
- Setting clear and realistic learning targets for each grade and publicizing these widely to teachers, students and parents can help to raise the quality of learning. Teachers should be encouraged to monitor learning regularly and give realistic feedback to students and parents. The development of higher-order thinking skills should be encouraged across the grades with increasing emphasis on higher-order thinking in the examinations. More use could be made of examination results to identify common areas of difficulties in each subject and to adapt in-service teacher training to improve teaching in these areas.
- The significant underachievement of boys should be examined and addressed systematically. As a first step, parents should be made more aware of the gender gap and encouraged to set higher expectations for boys. As key issues affecting boys' low performance are not well understood, a comprehensive empirical study should be conducted to identify factors and to inform an action plan to address them.
- There are several areas in which school curricula could be improved. In particular, given that a lack of English language proficiency is one of the main reasons students require a foundation year at most public and private universities, reviewing the English curriculum and teaching methods may be necessary. In addition, given the objective evidence suggesting that achievement levels in mathematics and science are low, a curricula review in these areas is warranted. Furthermore, "soft skills" development, such as team work, public speaking, problem solving, critical thinking and a strong work ethic, were seen as lacking by some employers. A reduction in the number of subjects that post-basic students are required to take may be necessary to ensure a deeper understanding of concepts. Since few staff at the MOE's Curriculum Development Directorate (CDD) have benefited from training in curriculum development or evaluation, a professional development program in these areas should be undertaken.

## Develop Strong Pedagogical Skills

### Current Situation:

Of all the factors affecting student learning that can potentially be influenced by public policy, teaching quality is the single most important one. An effective teaching force with strong pedagogical skills is the key to increasing education quality. Oman has a large teaching force with sufficient qualifications, but new teachers' skills are not developed adequately in preservice teacher training due to the lack of emphasis on pedagogical skills and the limited use of practical training. Currently teacher trainers do not have sufficient classroom experience or practical teaching skills. In-service training should be more practical and responsive to teachers' needs. In school, teachers' work needs to be refocused with more time devoted to teaching and less to reporting and administrative requirements.

### Specific Areas to Address:

- Teacher education courses are not well matched to the curriculum that new teachers are expected to teach or to teaching realities in Omani classrooms. In addition, courses lack a suitable emphasis on practical training, and the teacher trainers tend to have limited practical classroom experience themselves. Regulating teacher education courses would help to ensure that pedagogical skills are prioritized suitably and that newly qualified teachers are prepared to teach the curriculum.
- Teachers need to be focused on the quality of teaching and student learning. Even though teaching loads are low in Oman compared to other countries, teachers cite an overload of administrative tasks, such as reporting and recording, which takes their focus away from classroom performance. Rebalancing teachers' work to prioritize teaching quality and to reduce paperwork may be necessary. In-service training should focus on teaching skills for quality learning and teacher-peer activities should be supported, such as the formation of regional teacher subject associations.
- Ensuring an adequate supply of Omani teachers by forecasting need and supporting domestic provision will be necessary in the long term. The current teacher oversupply, which has contributed to the closure of some teacher education courses, has left little domestic capacity to train teachers for the first cycle of basic education. This poses a risk for the future and may increase reliance on non-Omani teachers. There are currently imbalances across subject specializations with a teacher oversupply in some areas and an undersupply in others. This unsatisfactory situation can be addressed by requiring teacher education institutions to be guided by long-term national needs as they select students for each specialization.
- Retaining teachers in remote areas is a challenge in Oman. Remote areas have a greater proportion of non-Omani teachers and significantly more turn over than urban areas. Providing an appropriate additional allowance for teachers in carefully targeted remote areas, extending the duration of stay in a school before a transfer can be requested, and giving preference to students from remote areas for teacher training may be options to consider.

## Other Challenges

In addition there are a number of specific areas in which access to education should be addressed in order to reach the Education for All (EFA) goals and contribute to education quality enhancement:

- Expanding the provision of publicly financed early childhood education (ECE) should be a priority given the current low participation rate and the substantial evidence of ECE benefits, particularly for school readiness. Private preschools, which have become popular in Oman and grown in number, are only accessible to families who can afford to pay for them. Initially in public ECE expansion, areas of poor educational performance should be prioritized and encouragement of private provision of ECE continued.
- Oman currently lacks adequate mechanisms for identifying and evaluating children with special needs, and it is likely that the true requirement for special needs education provision is greater than what is currently available. A national strategy for special needs education should be developed, involving all of the responsible ministries. Reliable data on the demand for educational facilities for children with special needs will be essential. Teachers who are responsible for integrating children with special needs into the classroom should receive appropriate training.
- While adult literacy rates have improved significantly in Oman, there is a need to review the literacy program's curriculum and delivery methods and to conduct an assessment of the literacy education needs of potential learners, particularly males who are currently under-represented in the programs. The quality of the literacy program could be enhanced by providing more centers, improving the curriculum and supporting materials, and developing a policy to attract, train and retain suitable teachers.

These recommendations have management and financial implications. In particular, reaching the goal of improved education quality will require all relevant ministries to unite their efforts and to plan together, for example through the development of a national strategy for education. Guiding the planning of the education sector could be the responsibility of a high-level body established with representation from the relevant ministries, including the MOE, the Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE), the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD), the Ministry of Health (MOH) and the Ministry of Finance (MOF), and other stakeholders including the private sector. Within the MOE, a management training program could be established to enhance the leadership and planning skills of senior officials.

Resources should be shifted toward quality-related inputs and to support teaching and learning initiatives. This resource shift could be achieved by reviewing the remuneration system for teaching and administrative staff. In particular, the review should focus on student-teacher and teacher-administrator ratios, which are currently low. Consideration could be given to the use of allowances to link remuneration to performance or acceptance of hardship posts rather than to seniority alone. Other management and finance initiatives aimed at improving quality include (1) granting more financial autonomy and management responsibility to the governorates, regions and schools to make decisions more relevant to local contexts; (2) conducting a tracking study of public finance for education to identify possible inefficiencies in resource allocation; and (3) ensuring that the data required to make sound informed policy decisions in education are produced in a timely manner and are valid and reliable.

This report acknowledges the tremendous achievements that Oman has made in education provision to date, and the capacity and political will that has facilitated the remarkable accomplishments. The challenge of improving education quality is not insurmountable for Oman, but it will require a shared vision, careful planning, focused use of resources and collaborative work involving all relevant stakeholders.





# SUMMARY

## EDUCATION IN OMAN: THE DRIVE FOR QUALITY



Through a series of development plans initiated in the early 1970s, Oman has achieved a rapid social and economic transformation under the leadership of His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said. Major developments in the education sector include a dramatic increase in the number of education institutions and student enrollments at all levels and a major modernization of the education system. Looking to the future, the Government of Oman seeks to build on these successes and continue economic and social development. Equipping its young population with the required knowledge, skills and attitudes is seen as a cornerstone in the strategy to move the country to even higher levels of achievement.



الاسعافات الأولية

استبدل العنق  
الأنف  
الجزء الأمامي للصدر  
الكتف  
الذراع  
اليد  
الرسغ  
المخاطب

## REPORT'S OBJECTIVES AND COVERAGE

This report is an analysis of the education sector in Oman, focusing mainly on pretertiary education. It is intended as a resource for policy makers, providing an analysis of the current state of the sector and highlighting some of the key priorities for the next phase of development. The analysis draws on a range of information sources, including data from the Ministry of Education (MOE) and other ministries, interviews with key stakeholders in the system, and information drawn from earlier studies and reports. This report covers multiple issues: access to education, quality of student learning and achievement, teachers and teaching methods, education's relevance to the labor market, and the education system's financing and management. While recognizing that education plays a strong social and societal role, the report focuses particularly on the linkage between the education sector and the labor market and on education's contribution to Omani goals for economic development. This report summary presents (1) the main findings of the analysis, (2) the main challenges facing the sector, and (3) suggested policy measures to address those challenges including a detailed matrix of policy recommendations (appendix 1).

## BACKGROUND

### **Young Omanis and working-age non-Omanis make up a large proportion of Oman's population.**

Population estimates from the Ministry of National Economy (MONE 2010), indicate that Oman has a high proportion of young people in its population. In 2009, 27 percent of its population of 3.2 million were under the age of 20, and 48 percent of Omani nationals were under the age of 20. This, however, is likely to change over the coming decades because of the recent drop in crude birth rates, which fell from 44.7 births per 1,000 Omani nationals in 1990 to 24.0 in 2004 (but rose to 29.5 in 2009); the population pyramid in figure 1 shows this effect (MONE 2010). Over one-third of the population is non-Omani, the majority of whom are male expatriate workers (in the 25–39 year age group) who are single or have families outside of Oman. Between 2008 and 2009, the population of Oman increased significantly — from 2.9 to 3.2 million — due largely to a 28 percent rise in the number of non-Omanis.

### **After many years of relying almost exclusively on oil receipts, the Government is now pursuing a diversified economy through industrialization and privatization.**

Oman is a high-income country with a gross national income per capita of US\$17,890 in 2008.<sup>1</sup> During the 2000s, growth averaged 4.6 percent per year (MONE 2010). The Government aims to reduce reliance on the oil sector from 40.6 percent of gross domestic product in 2009 (MONE 2010) down to 10 percent by 2020 (MONE 2007). Youth unemployment is a growing concern, and the country's "Omanization" policy has had mixed success so far.

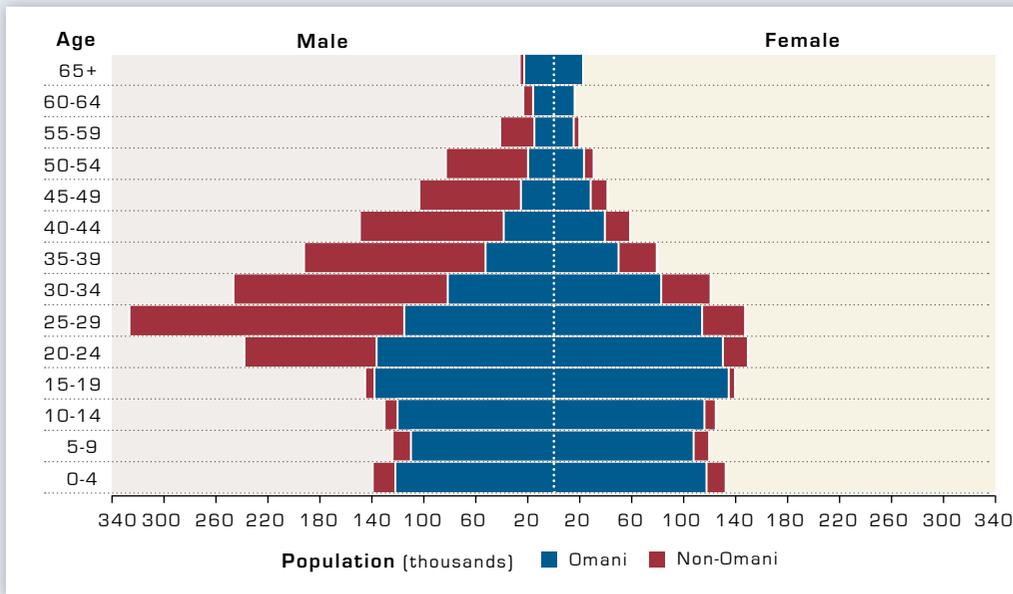
### **Oman has been ranked relatively highly in measures of human development in recent years.**

In the Human Development Index (UNDP 2009), Oman ranked 56th among 182 countries. This composite index measures average achievement in three basic dimensions of human development (a long healthy life, access to knowledge and decent standard of living).

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank Atlas method (World Bank Data Development Platform, December 2010).

**Figure 1**  
Composition of Oman's Population by Age Group, Gender and Nationality, 2009 (thousands)



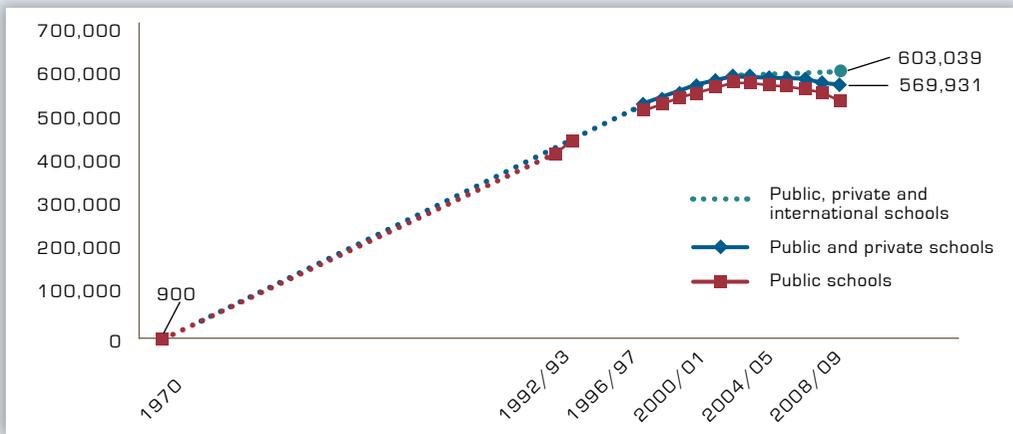
Source: MONE 2010.

**Table 1**  
Public Recurrent and Investment Expenditure in the Education Sector, 2005, 2007 and 2009

	All (Recurrent + Investment)			Recurrent			Investment		
	2005	2007	2009	2005	2007	2009	2005	2007	2009
Expenditure (current RO millions)	545.9	746.2	948.2	493.2	651.1	823.8	52.7	95.1	124.4
As a % of Total Government Expenditure	13.0	12.7	12.8	15.4	15.6	17.5	5.3	5.5	4.6
As a % of All Civil Ministries' Expenditure	26.3	27.3	24.6	32.2	34.3	37.2	9.7	11.3	7.6

Source: MONE 2008 and 2010.  
Note: Includes expenditures by MOE, MOHE, MDM and SQU.

**Figure 2**  
Number of Grade 1-12 Enrollments, 1970/71 to 2008/09



Source: MOE Statistical Department.  
Notes: Data for international schools are only available for 2008/09.

## PROGRESS AND ACHIEVEMENTS IN EDUCATION

Over the past 40 years, the profound transformation of Oman's education system has been marked by a number of notable achievements. First, the Government's commitment to education has been strong and well supported, enabling initiatives to be developed and realized. Second, children's access to education has increased dramatically, allowing unprecedented numbers of citizens to attain a school-level education. Education for All (EFA) has been virtually achieved. Finally, having achieved overall increases in access to education, Oman is now turning its attention to the quality of education, making a serious effort to focus on this critical area.

### Strong Government Commitment

**The Government's strong commitment to education is evident in its planning and strategies.**

The Long-term Development Strategy 1996–2020: The Vision for Oman's Economy (MONE 2007) reaffirms that human resources are a central pillar of the country's development strategy. In terms of financing, Oman has committed a large proportion of its civil ministries' recurrent budgets to education, 37.2 percent in 2009 (table 1).

**The Government restructured its education system in 1998/99 with the aim of improving learning outcomes.**

As part of this reform, the previous general education structure was replaced by basic education organized into cycle one (grades 1–4) and cycle two (grades 5–10). Basic education is followed by a two-year post-basic education cycle, comprising grades 11–12. Improvements have been made in physical facilities, curricula, teachers' qualifications and school management.

### Increased Access

**Building on a long tradition of family and community education, Oman moved rapidly to increase enrollment in a modern education system.**

Enrollment grew from 900 students in 1970 to over 600,000 in 2008/09 (figure 2). Participation in education for Omani nationals is almost universal in basic education (grades 1–10): in 2008/09, the gross enrollment ratio (GER) was 97 percent. For post-basic education (grades 11–12), the GER was also high at 86 percent for Omani nationals. This growth was achieved largely through the increased provision of public schools: in 2008/09, 1,047 public schools served 89 percent of the enrolled students.

**For both Omani and non-Omani students, retention from grade 1 to grade 12 has improved.**

The survival rate to grade 12 (for Omanis and non-Omanis) was 86 percent in 2008/09, up from 64 percent in 1998/99. Repetition rates have decreased considerably over this time period: currently there is no repetition in grades 1–4 and for grades 5–12 the repetition rates ranged from 1 to 6 percent for each grade in 2008/09. Dropout rates are also low (2 percent or less) with the exception of grade 10, the final grade before the transition to post-basic education, in which rates were 5 percent for females and 7 percent for males.

**Transition rates between educational levels have considerably increased.**

From the end of basic education to the start of post-basic education, the transition rate was 89 percent in 2008/09 (up from 73 percent in 1998/99). Meanwhile, a small but increasing number of basic education graduates has entered technical education and vocational training programs. For example, the number of students in vocational training centers (VTC) increased from 2,000 in 2005/06 to 2,929 in 2008/09, which represents 3 percent of the Omani population aged 16–17 (2 percent in 2005/06).

**In parallel, the capacity of the higher education sector has grown rapidly.**

Capacity has increased substantially with the opening of the Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) in 1986 and the growth of colleges of technology, colleges of applied sciences and other public higher education institutions, as well as private universities. Currently more than half (54 percent) of grade 12 graduates progress to higher education of whom 92 percent study in Oman. In 2008/09 the GER for tertiary education in Oman reached 36 percent.

**As a result of this rapid expansion, education participation in Oman is now at levels equal to or above other countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.**

The achievements are particularly notable for females: by the year 2000, 55 percent of Omani women aged 25–29 had completed tertiary education — a proportion similar to Singapore or South Korea. For Omani men, however, only 17 percent had completed tertiary education.

## Greater Focus on Quality

**With the success of expanded access to education, there has been increased focus on education quality.**

The MOE has conducted a series of national assessments to monitor learning outcomes for grades 4, 7 and 10. In addition, Oman has participated in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2007), which provides international benchmarks against which learning outcomes for grade 8 can be gauged.

**The current examinations system has many positive features.**

The Educational Evaluation Directorate (EED) has responsibilities for public examinations, which have significant impacts on the quality of teaching and learning. The staff and internal administrative procedures for EED are regarded as objective and fair. Positive features of the present examination system include (1) an appropriate technical approach to examination development; (2) a correction system assesses scorer reliability; (3) careful preparation of scoring guides; and (4) an appeals process.

**The many reforms undertaken in basic and post-basic education are testimony to the willingness to improve the quality of education.**

The reforms include the introduction of a student-centered approach in teaching and learning, emphasis on life skills and real-life applications in the curriculum, implementation of continuous assessment, and reduction of class size. A school-based management process has been implemented, and a program to evaluate overall school performance has been in operation for some years. The MOE has also raised the initial teacher qualification standard and increased the official number of instruction days.

**Increasing the pool of qualified Omani teachers has been at the core of the MOE strategy and is further evidence of the Government's objective to strengthen quality, given the importance of teachers in achieving this objective.**

In addition, the Omanization policy is critical because the dependence on an expatriate workforce has serious long-term political, economic, social and cultural consequences. Good progress has been made in recruiting and training Omani teachers. In 1981/82, the education system was mainly dependent on expatriate teachers, who accounted for 92 percent of the teaching force. By 2008/09, the balance had been reversed, and 89 percent of teachers were Omani. There has been a marked improvement in the level of teacher qualifications; currently 83 percent of teachers have a degree-level qualification up from only 8 percent in 1972.





## MAJOR CHALLENGES FOR EDUCATION

### Achieving Education for All

With the achievement of high enrollment rates in basic education, the remaining EFA goals, to which Oman is committed, are the provision of (1) early childhood education; (2) education for children with special needs; and (3) adult literacy education.

#### **Early childhood education:**

While early childhood education (ECE) provision in Oman has expanded, enrollment rates are still comparatively low. The total ECE enrollment of 41,482 in 2008/09 represents approximately 39 percent of the population of 4–5 year olds and is lower than the enrollment rate in other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. International evidence suggests that ECE is important in developing learning skills, results in a significant improvement in school-readiness, and ultimately has substantial economic and social benefits for children's future lives. The majority of ECE provision has been outside of the MOE, often in fee-charging private centers, which may constrain access for the poorest families. In 2008/09, 77 percent of ECE enrollment was in private centers: 35 percent in private Qur'anic schools, 29 percent in private kindergartens and 13 percent in international schools. There have been moves to expand public provision. The Child Growth Houses (supervised by the Ministry of Social Development) and the Child Corners (operated under the auspices of the Omani Women's Association) accounted for 17 percent of all ECE enrollments, and the Royal Oman Police and Royal Armed Forces preschools and public Qur'anic preschools accounted for 3 percent. In addition, in 2005/06 the MOE introduced a pilot program by establishing ECE "preparation classes" in basic education schools to address the shortage of ECE opportunities in rural and remote areas. By 2008/09 these preparation classes accounted for 3 percent of ECE enrollments. In collaboration with UNICEF and the private sector, in 2008 the MOE launched a national awareness campaign with the aim of increasing participation in ECE.

#### **Special needs education:**

Education provision for children with special needs is still quite limited in terms of total enrollment and geographical coverage. All three schools that offer specialized programs for students with hearing, intellectual or visual impairment are based in Muscat, the capital and largest city in Oman. In 2005/06 the MOE initiated a program to integrate students with hearing disabilities and the mentally challenged into basic schools, and 56 schools across all regions are now participating. At present, however, the total number of students in special needs programs represents approximately 1 percent of the basic-school-age population, which is considerably lower than the 10 percent international average proportion of children with special needs (World Bank 2003). The MOE has made an effort to extend the services to rural areas; however, services provision for students with special needs in the remote regions is still very limited. Development of services is hampered by the lack of adequate data on the numbers of children with special needs who are either in schools (without receiving special education intervention) or kept at home (without access to education).

#### **Adult literacy:**

Literacy levels have improved considerably. The MOE has taken initiatives to provide literacy programs for adults and school dropouts, but there is further scope for development. The MOE has launched several new initiatives. The Cooperative School Project, launched in 2003/04, aims to provide literacy programs for adults at public schools. The community-based Learning Villages Project was initiated in 2004 to provide literacy education programs for rural adult illiterates. Participation, however, is particularly low among males, and very few students who complete the three-year literacy programs continue in further education. There is scope to enhance program quality. In addition, teachers in literacy programs are paid at a low rate, resulting in difficulties attracting and retaining suitable teachers.

### **Data issues affect the accurate assessment of achieving EFA goals:**

The Government has high quality data on Omani children; however, the data on non-Omani children are less reliable (particularly for population estimates), making it difficult to monitor their participation in education. Since the EFA goals target all children in the country, including non-Omani children, Oman's progress towards these goals cannot be accurately monitored and evaluated without the availability of accurate, detailed population data on non-Omani children.

## **Quality of Student Learning Outcomes**

As Oman seeks to develop a strong internationally competitive economy by building on the skills of its people, it is important that access expansion is matched by high education standards achievement. At present, there are a series of challenges to learning quality: (1) national assessments have shown unsatisfactory learning outcomes with many students not reaching the expected standards, particularly in mathematics; (2) international assessments reveal that learning outcomes in Oman lag behind those in many competing economies; and (3) Oman has a significant gender gap with boys lagging behind girls. Evidence of the low level of student achievement includes the following:

### **1. National assessments indicate learning performance below expectations.**

A series of sample-based national assessments of grades 4, 7 and 10 carried out by the MOE indicated low student achievement at all grades tested. The grade 7 assessment, for instance, found that most students did not reach the standard expected by the MOE.

### **2. The Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS, 2007) shows that Omani students fall far behind students in most other participating countries.**

Oman participated in the TIMSS 2007, which provided an international comparison of students' learning achievement at grade 8. Omani students performed better than students in some of the other GCC and MENA countries, but their performance was well below that of East Asian and the majority of the other participating countries. For example, in mathematics a student on the 90th percentile in Oman (meaning she or he scored better than 90 percent of students in Oman) would be on the 15th percentile in Singapore (meaning she or he scored below 85 percent of students in Singapore).

### **Given the unsatisfactory learning outcomes, both students and teachers seem to be overconfident about the quality of their learning.**

On the TIMSS 2007 measures of self confidence in learning mathematics and science, Oman's students scored higher than the averages of participating countries. Furthermore, grade 8 teachers in TIMSS 2007 felt confident that they were familiar with the concepts covered in the assessments. The poor quality of student achievement causes difficulties at the point of entry to higher education, where the majority of students are required to take a foundation year to bring them up to the necessary standard to complete their studies successfully, particularly in English language.

### **Girls consistently outperform boys on measures of student learning outcomes.**

Over the last 30 years, the position of girls has moved from being underrepresented in education to substantially outscoring boys on all measures of student achievement. There are significant gender differences: (1) in the 2009 grade 12 examination, 92 percent of Omani girls achieved a pass compared with 83 percent of boys; (2) on each of the grade 7 national assessment subjects, girls outperformed boys in Arabic, mathematics, science and life skills, in most instances by very substantial margins; and (3) Oman had the largest gender difference (in favor of girls) of all 48 participating countries in TIMSS 2007 mathematics (and the third largest for science). For boys, there is little use of out-of-school time for educational purposes. The TIMSS 2007 survey revealed that less than half of boys spent an hour or more each evening on homework, and they tended to spend relatively little time reading for enjoyment. By contrast, 69 percent of girls spent an hour or more on homework.

## Assessment, Curricula and School Year

### **Time on task is limited by the relatively short school year.**

While the official target of a 180-day school year is consistent with international norms, in reality the school year is attenuated by examinations, special events and other closures. Examinations are held twice a year, resulting in lost learning time. These examinations have an impact even on junior classes, as teachers from basic education cycle one are taken out of the classroom to be examination enumerators. The cumulative effect of absences and time lost due to the public examination is hard to quantify, but some estimates indicate that the actual school year was as short as 110 days for boys and 126 days for girls in grade 12. Consequently the actual school year can be less than two-thirds of the expected contact time.

### **Greater emphasis should be placed on teaching and assessing higher-order thinking skills.**

The EED is making efforts to increase emphasis on promoting higher-order thinking skills. However, as in many other countries, the content and format of test items in previous examination papers tends to have a strong impact on instruction, and often “teaching to the test” is the result. The two-semester grade 12 examination system may also encourage students to concentrate on a specific portion of the curriculum over a relatively short period for each subject. The relatively high subject load in grade 12 — eight core subjects, three electives and a project — is not likely to encourage a deep understanding of key subject concepts. To facilitate a deeper engagement with the subjects, it may be necessary to reduce the number of subjects that each student studies, allowing each student to specialize in a smaller number of subjects chosen to match their individual needs and aptitudes. In the long term, it may also be desirable to introduce a broader range of subjects, allowing students a wider menu of choices.

### **Continuous assessment (CA):**

A system of continuous assessment has been introduced to reduce the dominance of examinations, allow scope for more formative assessment use, and allow greater focus on higher-order thinking skills. While some progress has been made, these aims have not all been achieved. A national survey found that the use of continuous assessment for formative purposes was infrequent, and 90 percent of teachers answered that they seldom looked back at what they had written in the report card. Although teachers generally supported the principle of continuous assessment, 70 percent complained that they found continuous assessment involved a heavy work burden, and one-half of teachers claimed that they had not received training in continuous assessment.

## Teachers and Quality of Education

### **Teacher supply:**

Oman has a large and well-qualified teaching force, and its achievement in Omanization is impressive. There is a need for ongoing monitoring and forecasting of teacher requirements to ensure an adequate domestic provision of new teachers. The closure of some teacher education courses in response to oversupply has left Oman with little domestic capacity to train categories of teachers, particularly teachers for cycle one of basic education. In the long term, this poses a risk to quality and may result in a resumption of the reliance on expatriate teachers or teachers trained abroad. Furthermore, the requirement for new teachers seems likely to rise in the medium term, as 13 percent of teachers will complete 20 years of service and become eligible for a full pension in the next 5 years.

**Dependence on non-Omani teachers:**

While teachers of general science, Arabic and Islamic Studies are almost all Omanis, there are shortages in specific subjects. There are shortages, for example, of qualified male Omani teachers in English and biology, and of female Omani teachers in physical education, arts and music in 2008/2009. As a result, 64 percent of male English teachers, 45 percent of male art teachers, 44 percent of male biology teachers, and 48 percent of female physical education and arts teachers are non-Omanis.

**Teachers in remote regions:**

The current system of teacher deployment results in the remote regions having proportionally more inexperienced teachers and expatriate teachers. Teachers posted to remote areas tend to transfer out as quickly as possible, for example, 59 percent of teachers in Al-Wusta and 42 percent of teachers in Dhofar have less than 5 years experience compared with 26 percent nationally. Expatriate teachers fill the vacancies in remote regions: one out of four teachers in Al-Wusta and Dhofar is non-Omani. The high level of staff turnover and inexperience is likely to have detrimental effects on the quality of student learning achievement.

**Initial teacher education:**

Teacher preparation is not adequately focused on pedagogical skills development. In order to teach for understanding, teachers need a repertoire of pedagogical skills, which can be developed and refined with practice. Teaching practice in initial teacher education is limited, and a relatively high proportion of the content is theoretical. School principals interviewed expressed concern about knowledge, English language proficiency and teaching skills of newly qualified teachers. In focus groups, student teachers expressed concern that they were not well prepared for classroom realities. For example at SQU, teaching practice accounts for only 6 percent of the total credits for the course, and it is not offered during the first three years of the course. In addition, many of the academic staff in teacher education institutions have little school teaching experience.

**In-service training:**

The Human Resources Development Directorate of the MOE provides a range of in-service short courses for teachers, but there is no systematic data on the impact of training on classroom practice. In a 2009 survey of 150 teachers in five regions, respondents asserted that (1) training was overly theoretical; (2) courses were delivered in a didactic manner and did not respond to the needs of the participants; and (3) trainers were not sufficiently expert in the content.

**Refocusing teachers on teaching:**

At present, teaching time is relatively low by international standards, yet teachers complain of an overload of paperwork and reporting. Reporting and evaluation systems are considered overly complicated. Teacher contact time is proportionally low relative to the time devoted to nonteaching tasks, such as preparing written narrative lesson plans for each lesson, updating assessment information, and fulfilling other reporting and administrative requirements.

## Relevance

**Progression to higher education:**

Most entrants to higher education in Oman are required to complete a “foundation year” before they commence their course. This foundation year is deemed necessary by the higher education institutes because grade 12 graduates lack skills, particularly in English proficiency. English is the medium of instruction in most public and private higher education institutions. While there are high expectations that the new basic and post-basic education programs will start to improve this situation in the coming years, it would still be beneficial for the MOE and Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE) to analyze the

main weaknesses of grade 12 graduates, to share the responsibilities for improved higher education readiness, and ultimately to phase out the foundation year.

**The skills of school leavers:**

Each year approximately 20,000 young people finish school in Oman and do not progress to further education. The MOE's challenge is to ensure that schools offer these young people more relevant and appropriate learning experiences to prepare them for life after school. While there is anecdotal information that many of these school leavers have skills that are poorly matched with labor market requirements, there is little systematic data on which to base changes to the system.

**Career guidance:**

The National Career Guidance Center (NCGC) was created in 2008 to provide counseling and information for students about the work world. To date, its overall effectiveness has not been evaluated formally. The NCGC created career guidance resource rooms in all schools that offer grades 5–12. Its work has been supported by collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), Ministry of Civil Services, SQU and private firms.

**Labor market in transition:**

The labor market in Oman is in transition from predominantly public sector employment to a more mixed economy with a vibrant private sector. In 2003, the public administration and education sectors together accounted for 38 percent of the labor force, while manufacturing employed only 9 percent. In the transition to a more competitive economy, the importance of private employment in the manufacturing and service sectors is likely to increase. This transition will have an impact on the skills profile required from employees.

**Dependence on expatriate labor:**

Expatriate workers dominate the private sector in Oman. In 2009, non-Omanis made up over one-third of the population, but comprised 75 percent of the workforce. In the private sector, only 15 percent of employees are Omani (compared to 86 percent of employees in the public sector). The expatriate labor force in the private sector has a bi-modal educational-level distribution: (1) a pool of unskilled laborers and (2) a group of highly educated professionals. Expatriates dominate all categories of employment in the private sector with the exception of clerical occupations, which are overwhelmingly held by Omanis.

**Female participation in the labor market:**

While girls outnumber and outperform boys in the education system, female workers are underrepresented in the labor market. In 2003, only 25 percent of females over the age of 15 were active in the workforce compared with 77 percent of males. One-fifth of job seekers, particularly females, stated that they were not willing to accept work in the private sector due to unsuitable working conditions.

**Employers' perspectives:**

Employers in the private sector have expressed concerns about the job readiness of graduates in Oman. Some employers prefer to employ expatriates or Omanis educated overseas rather than domestically educated Omanis because of their preparedness for work. Omani graduates from local universities are seen as insufficiently prepared in soft skills, such as team work, public speaking, problem solving and critical thinking, and they lack a strong work ethic and willingness to take responsibility.

**Job creation:**

There is an imbalance between education system output and job creation. Annually almost 60,000 young people reach working age, but the total number of jobs created during the 7th Five Year Plan was approximately 21,000 each year. In addition to the private sector employers' preference for

expatriate workers and foreign-educated Omanis, this imbalance will make it more difficult for young locally educated Omanis to find employment opportunities.

## Costs and Financing

### Recurrent expenditure on education:

Oman allocates a high proportion of its civil ministries' resources to the education sector. In 2009, recurrent expenditure on education (including the MOE, MOHE, MOM and SQU) accounted for 37 percent of all civil ministries' recurrent expenditure or 18 percent of total government recurrent expenditure. Education spending has increased at a faster rate than student numbers, resulting in rising unit costs. Given that Oman already allocates a high proportion of civil ministries' funds to education, further developments may have to rely more on efficiency gains and on private financing.

### Staff remuneration and utilization:

The proportion of government education spending that goes to staff remuneration in Oman is high by international standards. Staff costs account for over 90 percent of recurrent education expenditures in Oman, compared to the 2007 average of 64 percent in OECD countries for recurrent expenditure on teachers' salaries (OECD 2010). Consequently little is left for nonsalary recurrent expenditures directly impacting quality of education, such as teaching materials or initiatives to improve quality. High staffing levels in the education system drive the high total salary bill in the budget; there are large numbers of teachers relative to students and large numbers of administrators relative to teachers. The numbers of teachers and administrators have increased over time, despite the relatively stable number of classes, schools and students. As a result, in 2008/09 Oman's average student-teacher ratio (STR) was lower than the OECD average (10.6 for basic education in Oman compared to 16.4 for primary education in OECD countries), but the average class size (27) in Oman was greater than the OECD average (21).

### Limited discretionary power at the school level:

The bulk of discretionary funds available at the school level come from revenues generated by canteens, except for an allocation of petty cash. Only 85 percent of these revenues are kept at the school level, the rest are reimbursed to the regional MOE directorate. School principals have limited power in using the resources allocated to schools, and schools have few incentives to launch specific initiatives relevant to their local contexts.

### Private sources:

Currently private expenditure on education is low, accounting for only 4.3 percent of household expenditure in 2007/08. All GCC countries, except Saudi Arabia, have significantly higher rates of private enrollments than Oman. In 2008/09 in Oman, 10 percent of school enrollments were in private Arabic or international schools. In Bahrain, for example, 30 percent of enrollments were in private schools. The rise in private education enrollments at the preschool and university levels demonstrates high demand for education in Oman. While there is scope to increase the share of education expenditure from private sources in higher education, reliance on private finance — if not accompanied by a student aid system — can have socially regressive effects because better-off families are more able to afford costly education services.

### Budget classification:

The MOE budget presentation, which follows the national format, provides a clear picture of how public funds are allocated. However, it is purely input based and is of limited use for planning and monitoring, as resources are not classified by main functions or by education levels. Since there is no clear link between sectoral objectives and resource allocations, it is difficult to conduct a rigorous assessment of spending efficiency and to promote a culture of accountability in the education sector.

## Governance and Management

### **Interministerial harmonization:**

The responsibility in the education sector for policy analysis and development, training, and human resource development rests with a number of different bodies. In addition to the MOE, four other ministries play roles in the education sector: (1) the MOHE through affiliated universities and other higher education institutions (HEI); (2) the MOM through its VTCs and colleges of technology; (3) the Ministry of Health (MOH) through nursing schools and health science institutes; and (4) the Ministry of Social Development (MOSD) through its ECE programs. Without a central body to coordinate policy development, it is difficult to harmonize the development objectives and targets and to address systematic issues that require cross-ministerial inputs and consensus.

### **Information management:**

The MOE has established a new Directorate General for Information Technology, which is in charge of the management and delivery of information through the MOE's E-Portal. The education data in the E-Portal is based on information obtained from centralized and regional sources, which is detailed basic school-level data and MOE-wide data. This is a significant step forward and should provide more accurate and reliable data for policymakers. Currently, however, data are not commensurate with MOE ambitions to analyze, plan and monitor the education system as a whole and to accurately assess progress in achieving strategic objectives. In particular, the MOE should work with other relevant ministries to strive to improve the quality of demographic and financial data.

### **A comprehensive national qualifications framework:**

The MOHE has established a qualifications framework for higher education. This framework, however, does not include post-basic or technical and vocational qualifications. As such, Oman lacks a comprehensive national framework of qualifications to compare educational and training qualifications within a coherent structure and to facilitate movement between courses. The qualifications framework for higher education could provide a starting point for the development of a comprehensive national framework.

### **Decentralization:**

Recently some selected schools have been granted a degree of limited autonomy. However, with the exception of a small portion of canteen revenues, there is generally little scope at the school level to access resources for local circumstances. With more autonomy, principals and schools will be expected to accept increased accountability. The MOE's current policy to decentralize more functions to the regions is appropriate, and as the initiative gathers pace, further transfer of authority could be considered, including budgetary implementation; in-service training; teacher recruitment, appointment and transfer; and school design and construction.



  
 مدرسة الإمام المهدي بن مسعود للعلوم الشرعية  
 المستوى (١٠-١١)  
 وزارة الشؤون الإسلامية والأوقاف

بالعلم والإيمان نقيم مسان

بشرائنا بأصنافنا متقدمون

وَعِلْمًا لَمْ تَكُن تَعْلَمُونَ وَكَانَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ عَظِيمًا


 انهم من خوابر بحم وزون لهم سدي



## THE WAY FORWARD

The above challenges are not insurmountable. Oman has already demonstrated the capacity and political commitment to make rapid progress in the education sector. The following sections outline some of the policy measures that could be used to enhance the quality and relevance of education and to develop Oman's education system to higher levels of performance and efficiency.

### Focusing on Quality Educational Outcomes

Enhancing the quality of educational outcomes should be the priority for the next phase of development, to enable Oman to improve further its competitiveness and assist in attaining its economic goals. In particular, improving the outcomes for those with the least opportunities (for example, in terms of household educational background or income) should benefit the entire society. While improving quality is a complex, multifaceted task requiring a sustained effort, the MOE should give serious consideration to the following actions:

#### **Length of the school year:**

Extending the school year to reach the official target of 180 school days would provide more learning time and would bring Oman closer to international norms. The current loss of teaching and learning time could be reduced by ending the practice of canceling classes during examinations and by eliminating extended periods of absence by grade 12 students in advance of the public examinations. Reverting to one public examination period per year would also reduce time lost and would give the EED more time to improve the overall quality of the public examinations.

#### **Using examination results:**

Currently the EED disseminates examination results to interested MOE Director Generals. As a learning tool, the EED should consider giving detailed feedback directly to teachers on the common mistakes that students make. This could be done in a number of ways, including through in-service courses and the education portal. The EED should enhance its level of technical capacity, which would among other benefits allow it to support a long-term research and evaluation program.

#### **Examining the underachievement of boys:**

Boys' underachievement could undermine Oman's competitiveness and productivity. Examining the problem will require dedicated and focused research. Initially a comprehensive empirical study could be conducted to identify the key factors affecting boys' achievement, followed by the development of a specific action plan to address these factors.

#### **Curriculum development and capacity building:**

More use could be made of the objective data on student achievement in curriculum development. The Curriculum Development Directorate (CDD) — largely staffed by teaching professionals with few formally trained in curriculum development and evaluation — could institute appropriate training programs for its staff members. The CDD should consider a more participatory process for curricula design, working closely with other MOE departments and other educational stakeholders, including teachers and supervisors.

**Curriculum development and English:**

Given the widespread concerns over English standards, the CDD should develop a curriculum framework for English following extensive discussions with key stakeholders, including representatives of HEIs, employers and relevant MOE personnel. The discussion process should identify the relative importance of key aspects of English language learning, such as reading skills (including comprehension), writing, oral and aural (listening) skills. Current teaching and assessment approaches would be adjusted to reflect the resulting curriculum modifications.

**A culture of high standards:**

The CDD should continue with its plan to set realistic targets or standards for each grade. Teachers should be encouraged to monitor learning levels and provide feedback to students and parents. More attention should be devoted to teaching and assessing higher-order skills both in class and in public examinations. The MOE should take steps to increase parents' understanding of the standards expected of their children and of ways they can interact with their children and teachers.

**Monitoring of educational standards:**

As part of the move to enhance standards, the MOE should strengthen its capacity to monitor student achievement through technically adequate national assessments of education achievement levels and to report these on a regular basis to national policy makers. The MOE should take steps to improve teacher use of current assessment procedures by (1) adopting where possible in-service approaches other than the current cascade model; (2) limiting the amount of record keeping to those aspects which are considered most useful for formative assessment; (3) encouraging regular use of assessment results for diagnostic purposes; and (4) ensuring that teachers use realistic standards (developed in consultation with CDD) for assessing student achievement levels.

## Expanding Access in Specific Areas

While access to education has increased substantially in Oman, with GERs for Omani nationals of approximately 98 percent for basic education and 86 percent for post-basic education, there is scope to improve the rates of access to early childhood education, special needs education and adult literacy education.

**Early childhood education:**

It would be advisable for the MOE to seek to expand access to ECE, especially for the poorest sections of society and for rural children. Increased public investment will be needed to ensure equal opportunities for access to ECE. In particular, the MOE should mobilize financial and human resources to expand the number of preparation classes attached to public basic education schools in rural areas. In an effort to improve program quality, these classes should be taught by qualified teachers with appropriate conditions of employment. Initially expansion of preparation classes might be limited to one year prior to grade 1. Alternatively (or in addition) the experience of other countries could be examined to determine a suitable expansion method for Oman, such as the use of a voucher scheme to finance participation in private preschool education at agreed rates — although this mechanism is currently subject to debate in the professional literature. Finally the Government could develop a comprehensive and implementable ECE strategy that links to an overall education vision.

**Special needs education:**

The MOE, in cooperation with the MOH and MOSD, should consider developing a coherent national strategy for special needs education. Key initial steps should include (1) establishing mechanisms for identifying and evaluating children with special needs; (2) collecting reliable data on needs; and (3) providing appropriate training opportunities for teachers who are responsible for integrating students with special needs.

**Adult literacy:**

Objective evaluations of literacy program curricula and needs of potential adult learners and dropouts from the formal education system would help provide valuable information, which could be used to improve current literacy services. The services should be expanded to include more people in need of literacy programs, particularly males. This expansion will need to be supported by appropriately trained staff with suitable employment conditions.

## Developing an Appropriate Teaching Force with Strong Pedagogical Skills

**Teacher supply:**

To ensure high quality teaching in schools, there is a need to develop an adequate supply of teachers, design an efficient deployment system and make sure that teachers have the appropriate content knowledge and pedagogical skills. This will require monitoring and projecting teacher losses and scaling the initial teacher education capacity to the expected demand for teachers.

**Teacher deployment:**

The current policy of deploying teachers could be revisited with a view to reducing reliance on expatriate teachers in remote regions. A more substantial additional allowance could be paid to teachers in carefully targeted remote schools. The duration of stay in school before requesting a transfer could be extended to improve continuity in these schools. Greater preference could be given to candidates from remote areas at point of entry to teacher education courses and during recruitment.

**Regulation of teaching:**

A regulation system for teacher education should be instituted to enhance the quality and consistency of teacher preparation in both public and private institutions. This would help ensure that (1) student teacher preparation is well matched to the curriculum to be taught in schools after graduation and (2) development of pedagogical skills is given appropriate priority within teacher education programs. Measures could be devised to ensure that practical teaching skills are given greater weight and are better integrated into the initial teacher education programs.

**Quality of teaching:**

Improving quality will require teachers' work to be refocused on teaching and learning. To do this, reporting and evaluation systems will have to be simplified, and teacher contact time increased to ensure sufficient amounts of teaching time. Supervision, monitoring and appraisal systems could be rebalanced to prioritize teacher classroom performance over paperwork. Within the classroom, teachers should be expected to prioritize the teaching of curricular topics, and where possible to use after-class time for extracurricular activities.

**In-service training:**

The provision of in-service continuing professional development can be used to enhance the focus on teaching and learning. For in-service training, priority should be given to in-service courses related to teaching and learning, particularly to those involving practical classroom skills. Expert teachers should deliver these courses. International experience suggests that mutual support among teachers is an effective in-service teacher development strategy. Hence, consideration should also be given to encouraging regional teacher subject associations, where interested teachers of the same subjects have the opportunity to share experiences and discuss practices.

## Improving the Linkage between Education and the Labor Market

**Linkage with the work world:**

To improve the relevance of education, linkages between post-basic education, higher education and employers need to be strengthened. For example, employers and HEIs could clarify the skills and attitudes they expect from those leaving schools; these expectations might be communicated to students, parents and teachers.

**Curricula in education institutions:**

Revision of the post-basic education curricula and standards are needed to improve labor market relevance. In developing more labor market relevant skills into basic education, it will be necessary to find solutions that avoid selection at an early age and allow children to develop a range of skills and competencies matched to their interests and aptitudes. At post-basic level, reducing the separation between academic and vocational streams would help to facilitate the transition to the work world and to equip graduates from both streams with more marketable skills. This may require collaboration among the MOE, MOM and MOHE to increase the value of vocational courses, recognize job-related competencies, establish linkages between post-basic and vocational secondary education, and avoid early selection and specialization. As the Omani economy is modernizing and increasingly competing in a regional and global market, both academic skills and practical skills will be in high demand, particularly the higher-order skills. These include the ability to learn new things quickly, positive work attitude, ability to solve problems, and capacity for team work. Incorporating work experience into school programs could be part of the school curricula adjustment to life skills with a view to improving graduate employability.

**Flexibility:**

As the education system seeks to become more responsive to the needs of learners and the labor market, more flexibility will be necessary. Establishing the mechanisms that allow learners to delay specialization into specific tracks, to change track after specialization, and to return to formal learning after work experience can develop a flexible education system. Such a flexible system can facilitate the promotion of lifelong learning and allow individuals to adapt their education to their needs. Extending the concept of the higher education qualifications framework to the entire education and training system would be an essential step to promote this desired level of flexibility.

## Management and Financial Implications

### **An output-based budgetary approach:**

The shift from an input-based to an output-based budgetary approach would transform the budget to a management tool and a policy instrument. This would enable the MOE to assess the costs of achieving specific results. In addition, linking the budget to a medium-term expenditure framework (MTEF) could allow an output-based budget to reach its full potential by increasing the predictability of the resources needed to achieve the assigned objectives.

### **Tracking public finance:**

It would be useful to conduct a study to analyze how the expenditures allocated to the MOE are actually reaching their intended destinations. This could provide an in-depth and accurate profile showing possible inefficiencies and resource bottlenecks in the education sector. In addition to tracking financial resources from the Ministry of Finance (MOF) to the MOE at the central, regional and school levels, human and in-kind resource flows should be mapped to clarify how these resources are channeled to the end users of education services.

### **Review of remuneration:**

A comprehensive review of the remuneration system for teaching and administrative staff could lead to long-term positive implications for financing the education sector. The review should focus, in particular, on student-teacher ratios and the teacher-administrator ratios (both favorable by international standards). It could lead to a shift of more financial resources to provide quality-related inputs and support new sector initiatives. Remuneration policies should be reviewed to see if performance incentives could be introduced into the remuneration system, while respecting public service regulations. Some allowances, for example, might be linked to the results of staff performance evaluations and could provide a performance incentive, as well as injecting some dynamism into a system where remuneration rates are driven solely by seniority. Consideration might be given also to linking allowances to a post's hardship level.

### **Financial autonomy of schools:**

The MOE may consider granting more financial autonomy to schools to promote further decentralization. The MOE's regional directors, located closer to the field of operations, may be in a position to make more informed decisions regarding resource allocation. At the school level, providing principals with more discretionary power over larger amounts of resources would make school operations more relevant to local circumstances. Increased financial devolution of power to decentralized levels, provided it is accompanied by strict transparency measures, would contribute to promoting accountability and efficiency in resource utilization.

### **Enhancing interministerial collaboration and developing a national strategy for education:**

Education is a key national policy and its scope stretches beyond a single ministry. In building a coherent, integrated strategy for education, close cooperation among the relevant ministries, including the Ministries of Higher Education, Manpower, Social Development, Health and Finance, is needed. The establishment of a high-level body with representation from these ministries and a variety of other stakeholders, including the private sector, could guide the sector's development. Close interministerial and interagency collaboration will be critical in such areas as revising curricula to reflect the changing needs of society and the labor market.

**Establishing a management training program:**

To contribute to improving the management capacity of leaders and senior officials in the education sector, the MOE could consider establishing a graduate-level diploma program for leadership and management studies in collaboration with the Public Administration Institute of Oman and SQU. This management training could be delivered in a variety of flexible modalities, including in-class lectures and discussions, as well as on-line programs.

**Decentralization and school-based management:**

The MOE may consider the extension of school-based management to all schools, including basic education schools in cycles one and two. The decentralization of responsibilities to governorates and regions could be deepened and extended. These changes could be planned and gradually phased in concurrently with appropriate capacity development and accountability measures.

**Comprehensive, user-friendly information system:**

The MOE could expand the E-Portal and use the opportunity of this tool to build a more comprehensive system that provides decision makers with a reliable set of data and indicators on the education sector. Such a system would enhance evidence-based decision making; improve the capacity to follow up the progress made within the education system; help to devise mitigating measures in cases where progress is not as planned; and aid in the development of accurate forecasts for planning purposes.

**Data quality:**

Collecting and periodically updating more accurate and relevant data, particularly the information regarding non-Omani children, would help monitoring and evaluation of the outcomes of education policies, including the progress towards EFA goals.



## CONCLUSION

The education sector in Oman has made remarkable progress since 1970, particularly in expanding access to education, developing an Omani teaching force, and building an Omani higher education sector. These achievements have been the result of strong government commitment, effective policies and consistently favorable resource allocations. There are, of course, challenges remaining, chiefly in raising the quality of learning outcomes to meet the highest international standards. Developing high standards of learning, in particular higher-order skills, is an important step towards Oman's aim to develop a modern, knowledge-based and globally competitive economy. Achieving a substantial leap in quality will require continued political commitment, careful planning and sustained resourcing, but the achievements of the education sector in Oman over the last 40 years give confidence that the country can meet these challenges.





# APPENDIX





بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
سُبْحَانَكَ اللَّهُمَّ رَبِّيَ الْأَعْلَى  
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رِزْقٌ غَيْرٌ زَيْدٍ وَسَعْيٍ

## APPENDIX 1.

### MATRIX OF POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION (MOE)

	Policy Recommendation	Rationale	In Collaboration With	Time Frame
<b>A. Focusing on Quality</b>				
<b>A.1</b>	<b>Increase student time on meaningful learning</b>			
A.1.1	Meet target of a 180-day school year. To enforce the target, the MOE should (a) Require term extension for lost official school days; (b) Keep grades 1 – 11 operating before and during grade 12 examinations; (c) Hold grade 12 examinations at school year end; and (d) Ensure teachers prioritize curricular topics, using after-class time for extracurricular activities.	The official annual target is 180 school days, but the actual number is substantially shorter due to school closures for events and use of teachers as examination invigilators, resulting in class cancellations.		Short
<b>A.2</b>	<b>Develop a culture of high learning standards and align with curricula and public examinations</b>			
A.2.1	Set clear and realistic learning targets for each grade and encourage teachers to monitor learning regularly.	Sharing clear and realistic targets with stakeholders can raise learning quality.		Short
A.2.2	Reform public examination content to increase assessment of higher order skills.	Predictability of public examinations can encourage rote learning rather than develop higher-order skills.		Medium/long
A.2.3	Provide regular and realistic feedback to parents and link appropriate achievement information to national norms.	A disconnect is evident between students' actual achievement and their confidence in their abilities.		Short
A.2.4	Support further development of regular national monitoring of student achievement levels to produce valid, objective data for policy makers.	Policy makers lack good quality, timely data on student achievement of key learning objectives.		Medium/long
A.2.5	Analyze examination results to identify and address learning difficulties; determine specific subject areas for in-service teacher education focus.	Interested MOE Director Generals receive examination results, but data are not used as a learning tool.		Short
A.2.6	Support long-term research and evaluation program for Educational Evaluation Directorate (EED) staff to strengthen examination system quality and to provide useful feedback to policy makers and stakeholders.	Few EED staff have technical training in key aspects of examination paper development, research and evaluation.		Medium/long
A.2.7	Implement a program of activities to improve continuous assessment (CA) program by establishing moderation review committees.	Moderation is an essential component of effective CA and currently lacks rigor in Oman.	Schools/teachers	Short
A.2.8	Consider global trends in curriculum development; examine national/ state curricula and experience of other countries and international/ national assessments to identify areas that could improve Omani curriculum quality.	The experience of other countries can enhance curriculum development.		Short
A.2.9	Strengthen technical competence of Curriculum Development Directorate (CDD) staff in curriculum development. Consider a twinning arrangement with an internationally respected center.	CDD staff recruited mostly from teaching profession so lack formal training in curriculum development and evaluation.	Ministry of Higher Education (MOHE)	Short

Short-term: implemented within five years. Medium/long term: implemented beyond five years.

	Policy Recommendation	Rationale	In Collaboration With	Time Frame
<b>A.3</b>	<b>Examine and address boys' underachievement</b>			
A.3.1	Increase parental awareness of the gender gap and set higher expectations for boys.	TIMSS 2007 shows Oman's gender gap is the highest. Reasons for significant performance gap for boys may lie in use of out-of-school time and child-rearing practices.	Parents and schools	Short
A.3.2	Provide boys and their parents with realistic and valid performance assessments.	Despite their poor TIMSS 2007 results, boys had unjustifiably high confidence levels in their academic progress.	Schools and teachers	Short
A.3.3	Undertake a comprehensive empirical study to identify key factors affecting boys' underachievement.	Key issues in boys' underachievement are not well understood.		Short
<b>A.4</b>	<b>Increase involvement of parents and community in education</b>			
A.4.1	Run public awareness campaign to inform parents of their potential to enhance children's development and attitudes toward learning and achievement.	Home is a critical factor in overall development. Parents can read, monitor homework, organize extracurricular activities and encourage school attendance.	Schools and parents	Short
A.4.2	Encourage meaningful parent involvement in school life through parent-teacher committees.	With involvement, parents can understand schools' expectations and can improve students' perception of schoolwork's importance.	Schools	Medium/long
<b>B. Expanding Participation in Specific Areas</b>				
<b>B.1</b>	<b>Expand provision of early childhood education (ECE)</b>			
B.1.1	Expand publicly financed preschool education.	International research shows ECE importance. Participation in ECE is low in Oman, but private preschool growth reflects strong demand.		Medium/long
B.1.2	Target areas of poor educational performance initially.	Benefits of ECE are usually substantial for children from the least affluent and least-educated families.		Short
B.1.3	Develop an ECE strategy that links with an overall education vision and includes a diagnosis, long-term vision, short-medium term strategic plan and implementation arrangement.	A national strategy coordinating all relevant stakeholders will ensure expansion and improvement of ECE.	All stakeholders	Short
<b>B.2</b>	<b>Expand special needs education</b>			
B.2.1	Develop a coherent national strategy for special needs education.	A national strategy coordinating all relevant ministries (including Ministry of Health (MOH) and Ministry of Social Development (MOSD)) will manage special needs education issues coherently.	MOH and MOSD	Short
B.2.2	Establish mechanisms for identifying and evaluating children with special needs.	Oman currently lacks adequate mechanisms for identifying and evaluating children with special needs.	MOH and MOSD	Short
B.2.3	Collect reliable data on demand for educational facilities to serve children with special needs.	Lack of reliable data hampers the appropriate strategy development.	MOH and MOSD	Short
B.2.4	Provide appropriate training for public school teachers responsible for integrating students with special needs.	Teachers currently receive little training to adapt teaching methods for class integration of special needs children.	MOHE	Medium/long

Short-term: implemented within five years. Medium/long term: implemented beyond five years.

	Policy Recommendation	Rationale	In Collaboration With	Time Frame
<b>B.3</b>	<b>Improve adult literacy education quality</b>			
B.3.1	Evaluate literacy program curriculum and delivery methods; conduct a literacy needs assessment for potential adult learners and dropouts from formal education system, particularly males.	The current literacy program is relatively small, has problems attracting good tutors or teachers and has a substantial under-representation of males.		Short
B.3.2	Enhance the quality of the literacy program by creating more centers for literacy courses, improving the curriculum and supporting materials, and developing a policy to attract and retain suitable teachers.	Oman's literacy levels have improved considerably but measures exist to reduce illiteracy further and to improve literacy learning quality.		Medium/long
<b>C. Developing an Appropriate Teaching Force with Strong Pedagogical Skills</b>				
<b>C.1</b>	<b>Develop an adequate supply of teachers</b>			
C.1.1	Guide teacher education institutions with specific numbers for each specialty.	An imbalance exists with shortages in some specializations and oversupply in others.	MOHE	Short
C.1.2	Publish figures on projected teacher requirements.	Requirement projections could assist students in course selection for future employment.		Short
C.1.3	Adjust long-term teacher supply to meet projected demand in each subject area.	Ensuring an adequate supply of teachers will reduce reliance on expatriates. Recent changes have reduced the output of teachers for basic education cycle one and may result in reliance on teachers trained in other countries in the medium term.	MOHE	Medium/long
C.1.4	Staff ECE preparation classes attached to basic education schools with qualified teachers who have the same employment status as basic education teachers.	Employing qualified staff will ensure high quality ECE and help retain staff.		Short
<b>C.2</b>	<b>Address issues of teacher deployment</b>			
C.2.1	Provide a substantial additional allowance for teachers in carefully targeted remote schools.	Teachers tend to leave remote area schools after serving relatively short periods; these areas are over reliant on expatriate teachers.		Medium/long
C.2.2	Extend teacher duration of stay in remote area schools before granting transfer.	Current duration before transfer request is one year.		Short
C.2.3	Give preference to remote area candidates when selecting students for preservice teacher education courses and for subsequent recruitment.	Teachers from remote areas are more likely to remain than those from urban areas.	MOHE	Short
<b>C.3</b>	<b>Enhance teacher education quality and consistency</b>			
C.3.1	Regulate teacher education courses to ensure preparation for curriculum and emphasize practical development of pedagogical skills. Increase teaching practice hours and enhance the role of the cooperating teacher. Consider accreditation of teacher education courses that meet required standards.	Teacher preparation courses do not match the current curriculum well, and practical component of teacher education courses is small.	MOHE	Short
C.3.2	Develop a system of temporary secondment of experienced teachers to teacher education institutions.	Many teacher trainers have limited school teaching experience.	MOHE	Medium/long

Short-term: implemented within five years. Medium/long term: implemented beyond five years.

	Policy Recommendation	Rationale	In Collaboration With	Time Frame
<b>C.4</b>	<b>Focus teachers on quality of teaching and student learning</b>			
C.4.1	To increase teaching time, simplify reporting and evaluation. Rebalance supervision, monitoring and appraisal to prioritize teacher classroom performance over paperwork.	Despite low teaching loads, teachers complain of an overload of time devoted to paperwork, recording and reporting.		Short
C.4.2	Avoid teacher specialization in early grades.	Specialization can impede teachers' ability to know students, address individual needs and integrate learning.	Schools	Medium/long
<b>C.5</b>	<b>Focus in-service continuing professional development on teaching and learning</b>			
C.5.1	Give priority to in-service courses related to teaching and learning, particularly on classroom skills delivered by experienced teachers.	To focus on education quality, in-service training should prioritize teaching for quality learning.	Schools and teachers	Short
C.5.2	Support teacher-peer activities, including formation of regional teacher subject associations.	Cascade model of professional development delivery is not optimal for changing teachers' classroom practices.	Schools and teachers	Short
<b>D. Improving Education Relevance</b>				
<b>D.1</b>	<b>Strengthen links among education system, higher education institutions (HEI) and employers</b>			
D.1.1	Share information on university and employer requirements and basic and post-basic education system expectations.	There is a lack of information flow between HEIs, employers, government and parents and students on skills required, recruitment plans, assessments of graduates, and so on.	MOHE and National Career Guidance Center (NCGC)	Short
D.1.2	Revise curricula and standards to improve labor market relevance.	Employer feedback suggests curricula and school standards could improve.		Medium/long
D.1.3	Analyze weaknesses of new entrants to higher education; work to address identified issues to eliminate need for a foundation year.	Most HEIs require entrants to complete a "foundation year" due to their lack of skills, particularly in English.	MOHE	Short
D.1.4	Reduce the separation between academic and vocational streams; increase vocational course value; and avoid early selection and specialization.	Employers may require a mix of academic, practical and metacognitive skills.		Medium/long
D.1.5	Incorporate work experience into school programs.	Work experience in school could focus students on necessary skills and guide course choices, aiding transition from school to work.	Schools and employers	Medium/long
<b>D.2</b>	<b>Improve the quality of curricula</b>			
D.2.1	Clarify necessary aspects of English language learning (reading, writing, oral skills or listening skills); modify the curriculum; and prioritize appropriate teaching methods.	Most HEIs instruct in English: feedback indicates new entrant English levels are low. Spoken English standards also concern employers.		Short
D.2.2	Review mathematics and science curriculum.	Evidence suggests unsatisfactory achievement in mathematics and science. Improve student learning quality in these subjects highly valued by employers.		Short

Short-term: implemented within five years. Medium/long term: implemented beyond five years.

Policy Recommendation		Rationale	In Collaboration With	Time Frame
D.2.3	Reduce the number of subjects required in post-basic education.	To improve post-basic education quality, reduce required subjects and increase understanding of priority subjects.		Short
D.2.4	Improve curriculum development through training and professional development for CDD personnel, and use available appropriate objective student achievement data.	Formal training in curriculum development and evaluation lags. National and international learning assessments provide useful information for future curriculum development.		Short
<b>D.3 Increase flexibility within the education system</b>				
D.3.1	Build a flexible system that delays specialization, allows changes after specialization, and offers reentry to learning after work experience.	International experience indicates considerable benefits from a flexible education system, allowing longer participation, transitions to different levels, and transfers across courses and institutions.	MOHE	Medium/long
D.3.2	Develop a comprehensive national qualifications framework (NQF).	A comprehensive NQF allows course comparison and facilitates transitions among pathways.	MOHE	Medium/long
<b>E. Management and Financial Implications</b>				
<b>E.1 Strengthen sector vision and planning</b>				
E.1.1	All relevant ministries collaborate to develop and implement a national education strategy.	As a national priority, education's scope extends beyond the MOE and MOHE.	MOHE, MOM, MOSD and Ministry of Finance (MOF)	Short
E.1.2	Establish a high-level education development body coordinating all relevant ministries, stakeholders and the private sector.	A coordinating body can organize priorities to meet policy goals like revising curricula and aligning teacher training and supply.	MOHE, MOM, MOSD, MOF and other relevant agencies	Short
E.1.3	Improve data collection and usage for planning. This includes an education management information system based on more accurate, reliable, timely and publicly available data on all aspects of the education system.	Currently some key education indicators are not available or inaccurate. This hinders planning and monitoring progress of reforms.	MOHE, MOM and MOF	Short
E.1.4	Centralize research and evaluation through a National Education Research and Evaluation Center; support its personnel through sustained capacity building to provide objective evidence on the educational system. For future development, evaluate major initiatives such as whole-school evaluation, in-service teacher training and guidance counseling.	Numerous bodies do education research and evaluation but lack key skills for research design, statistics and test development.		Medium/long
<b>E.2 Enhance sector management capacity</b>				
E.2.1	Develop educators' leadership and management skills with systematic training at central, local and school levels, possibly as a postgraduate course.	Many education leaders do not have relevant training and preparation for their role.	MOHE	Short
E.2.2	Define clear roles and responsibilities for MOE staff.	Reduce duplication and enhance accountability and transparency.		Short
E.2.3	Extend school-based management to all schools; broaden decentralization of responsibility to governorates and regions.	Further decentralization to governorates, regions and schools informs decisions based on local contexts.		Medium/long

Short-term: implemented within five years. Medium/long term: implemented beyond five years.

	Policy Recommendation	Rationale	In Collaboration With	Time Frame
<b>E.3</b>	<b>Performance management</b>			
E.3.1	Consider structures to encourage and reward performance of teachers and administrators.	Current performance management system has little incentive for excellence.		Medium/long
E.3.2	Consider linking promotion to performance, for example, with a competitive selection system for senior teachers.	Linking promotion to performance could encourage regular attendance, positive engagement with professional development and professional attitudes.		Medium/long
<b>E.4</b>	<b>Review the financial structure</b>			
E.4.1	Examine the scope for efficiency gains: improving the budget system; reviewing remuneration and staffing policies; and conducting public expenditure tracking survey (PETS) to identify bottlenecks.	A high proportion of civil ministries' funds are allocated to education, so further development likely to rely on efficiency gains.	MOF	Short
E.4.2	Consider moving from input-based financing to an output-based approach.	Linking resource allocations to specific outputs and functions provides a transparent financial incentive to promote performance.	MOF	Medium/long
E.4.3	Review salary bill to improve efficiency in teacher allocation and utilization and to free more resources for investment in quality improvement and new initiatives.	Oman has low student-teacher ratios and high class sizes. Increasing teaching hours could release resources to reduce class sizes or expand ECE.		Medium/long
E.4.4	Consider diversifying sources of funding while rationalizing expenditures and ensuring equal access; for example, user financial contributions at post-basic level could be targeted at noncore activities with financial aid for those in need.	It will be difficult to sustain quality education relying solely on public resources.		Medium/long
E.4.5	Increase the scope of private contributions to education. This requires revamping regulatory framework and strengthening quality control mechanisms.	Opening education to more private investment would alleviate the burden on MOE.		Medium/long

Short-term: implemented within five years. Medium/long term: implemented beyond five years.







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