



OMAN QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

BENCHMARKING ACTIVITY REPORT

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ACRONYMS

APEL	Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning
AQF	Australian Qualifications Framework
CAS	Colleges of Applied Science
CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CET	Continuing Education and Training
GCC	Gulf Cooperation Council
HE	Higher Education
MQF	Malaysian Qualifications Framework
NFQ	National Framework of Qualifications (Ireland)
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQFB	National Qualifications Framework of Bahrain
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
NZQF	New Zealand Qualifications Framework
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OQF	Oman Qualifications Framework
QF Emirates	United Arab Emirates Qualifications Framework
QQI	Quality and Qualifications Ireland
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SQA	Scottish Qualifications Authority
TRoQ	Targeted Review of Qualifications
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
WDA	The Singapore Workforce Development Agency

1. INTRODUCTION

In March 2014, the Sultanate of Oman Education Council recommended the existing National Qualifications Framework for Academic Qualifications be further developed to form a comprehensive framework to include all types of qualifications from all sectors of education and training. The decision of the Education Council in March 2014 tasked the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) to take this work forward¹.

To carry out this remit, OAAA included within its organisational structure, *The National Qualifications Framework Department*, headed by a Director of National Qualifications Framework. The Department is augmented by a dedicated Development Team which is comprised of senior representatives from the: Ministry of Defence; Ministry of Health; Ministry of Manpower; Sultan Qaboos University; Ministry of Higher Education; and Ministry of Education. The Department is further supported by a Quality Assurance Consultant.

The Scottish Qualifications Authority (SQA) was engaged as the external partner to assist OAAA in the development of a comprehensive national qualifications framework for Oman. An Oversight Committee was established by OAAA, the membership of which comprises representatives from key organisations in Oman. Its remit is to provide: advice on OQF developments; be the principal means for the dissemination of information within their organisations; and be the conduit for consultation. The organisations represented on the Oversight Committee are given in Appendix 1. In addition, an International Panel from: the Kingdom of Bahrain; Ireland; United Arab Emirates; New Zealand; Hong Kong; Malaysia; and South Africa provide the perspective of the `critical friend`. The composition of the International Panel is given in Appendix 2.

It is anticipated that the project to develop a national qualifications framework in Oman, to be known as the Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF), will be carried out in two phases, both of which will be completed by mid-2017.

An early objective in the OQF Project Plan was to carry out `benchmarking activity` to determine good practice in qualifications frameworks and provide recommendation on a range of key features for the OQF. This activity initiates the **first** of many reports that will culminate in Phase One with a proposed Technical Design for the OQF. The other reports leading up to this will be an Environmental Scan which

¹ Sultanate of Oman, The Education Council *The Most Remarkable Projects Developed by The Education Council*, pg14

will examine the current qualifications available in the Sultanate, a Mapping Report which will examine the readiness of a small sample of the available qualifications to be placed on the framework, a Conceptual Design Framework which will flesh out those key features that, through consultation on the recommendations set out in Section 6 of this report, Omani stakeholders want to feature in the OQF.

Therefore, the recommendations on the key features of the OQF are the **first** of many building blocks in the development and design of the OQF².

Business Dictionary³.com defines Benchmarking as:

`A measurement of the quality of an organization's policies, products, programs, strategies etc., and their comparison with standard measurements, or similar measurements of its peers.

The objectives of benchmarking are (1) to determine what and where improvements are called for, (2) to analyze how other organizations achieve their high performance levels, and (3) to use this information to improve performance.'

The purpose of the benchmarking activity was to examine `good practice` in a range of existing national qualifications frameworks (NQFs) and, through this study, inform recommendations for the development of the OQF in areas such as the:

- Rationale, purpose of the OQF;
- Type of framework that would be most appropriate;
- Scope of the OQF;
- Key goals, purpose and outcomes;
- Whether there are arrangements for:
 - recognition of prior learning (RPL);
 - credit accumulation and transfer (CAT); and
 - articulation;
- Any other features found to be necessary⁴.

The activity was also the first post-orientation task of the newly-formed OQF Development Team who represent the main sectors of the education and training systems in Oman.

² http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Framework.aspx#Fm_Qualification

³ <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/benchmarking.html#ixzz3re9o8erK>

⁴ Oman Academic Accreditation Authority, Project Phase 1, March 2015 (unpublished)

As previously stated the Development Team are from the:

- Ministry of Defence;
- Ministry of Higher Education;
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Health;
- Ministry of Manpower; and
- Sultan Qaboos University.

Under the guidance of the SQA experts, the OQF Development Team undertook a rapid but extensive review of seven NQFs⁵ two of which were in the immediate region (UAE and the Kingdom of Bahrain).

In addition, the SQA Team reviewed the:

- available policy documents, including the Sultanate of Oman Education Council, *The Most Remarkable Projects Developed by the Education Council*⁶, the joint report from the Sultanate of Oman and the World Bank, *The Drive for Quality*⁷, to identify the expectations for a comprehensive national qualifications framework;
- OAAA *Project Proposal for the Development of a Comprehensive Qualifications Framework for Oman and Planning for the Implementation and Maintenance of the Framework*⁸.

Combining the results of these lines of enquiry and through the review of the seven NQFs which identified a range of features that were regarded as relevant for the OQF, a set of recommendations for the OQF were developed and these are set out in Section 6. In January 2016, SQA Technical Experts presented the proposed recommendations at a meeting of the OQF Oversight Committee. A questionnaire, based on the recommendations was developed and circulated for dissemination to seek the views of the OQF Oversight Committee members, their colleagues and networks as appropriate (Appendix 1). Comments on the content and relevancy of the draft Benchmarking Activity Report was also sought from the International Panel and the Oversight Committee and their responses and suggestions are summarised in Section 8.

⁵ Bahrain, United Arab Emirates, Malaysia, Ireland, New Zealand, Australia and Scotland

⁶ Sultanate of Oman Education Council (undated) *The Most Remarkable Projects Developed by the Education Council*

⁷ Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Education and the World Bank, *Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality*, Summary Report (2012)

⁸ Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (Sept 2014), *Development, Implementation and Maintenance of a National Qualifications Framework for Oman* (project proposal)

The outcome of the consultation, set out in Section 7, established that stakeholders were strongly in agreement with 18 of the 33 proposals. Responses ranged from 100% agreement to 72% agreement with the least agreement being for the OQF to recognise relatively small sets of learning outcomes (72%).

The results of the Benchmarking Activity Consultation provide a valuable contribution to the subsequent work to develop a national qualifications framework for Oman. As previously stated (pg. 6) this work will include a study of the current qualifications environment to produce an Environmental Scan Report, a study of a sample of qualifications which will result in the Mapping Activity Report, a review of the outcome of the consultation on the Benchmarking Activity Report to flesh out stakeholder's requirements for the OQF in a Conceptual Design Framework Report and the identification of an appropriate governance and legal/regulatory environment for the OQF which will be essential for the development of the Technical Design Framework. The results of the Benchmarking Activity Report are also useful to help in the identification of countries for study visits in order to ascertain further, more in-depth, information.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The aim of this section of the Benchmarking Activity Report is to provide some background information on the context of education in Oman and the demographics of Oman which are factors that drive the need for and, influence the development of, a comprehensive OQF.

2.1 The Context of the Education System in Oman

On many occasions, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said has stressed how important learning and training is for human development and the wealth of the nation. Most recently, in November 2015, His Majesty addressed the 38th UNESCO General Conference where he stated:

‘Education is unquestionably the main pillar in human building and the most important tool for achieving sustainable development goals.’⁹

It is recognised that, for sustained development, education and training need to meet the needs of the labour market and that the quality of education in all sectors — general education, technological and vocational education and training (TVET) and higher education—needs to improve.

⁹ Oman Observer, 9 November 2015

Prior to 1970, when His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Said began his rule, there was very little formal education in Oman. Since that time education has been of vital importance to build up the knowledge, skills and competence of the Omani people. Within five years, from 1970 to 1975, the number of schools rose from 3 to 207 and the number of students, of both genders, from 900 to over 55,500. In 2014/15 there were over 526,400 students¹⁰. The context in which the OQF is to be implemented is, therefore, an education system characterised by extremely rapid development. A brief overview of the education system is given in the following sections which, unless otherwise stated, are summarised from the Ministry of Manpower document *The System of Education and Training in Sultanate of Oman*. Section 2.1.4 was provided by the member of the OQF Development Team who represents the Ministry of Manpower.

2.1.1 Pre-school, Basic and Post-Basic Education

There is the opportunity for children to start **non-compulsory** pre-school which has three 'grades': nursery (before the age of 3). There is no formal schooling at this age and it is under the Ministry of Social Development. Lower kindergarten (age 3.2); and upper kindergarten (age 4.2) is under the Ministry of Education. It is compulsory for all children to attend basic education which lasts for ten years. This is divided into two stages: first cycle (grades 1-4) and second cycle (grades 5-10). After successful completion of basic education, students continue to post-basic education (grades 11-12) which aims to prepare students for higher education, the military or employment. Pre-school, basic and post-basic education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education.

2.1.2 Special Needs Education

Special needs education is important to help those with a disability to take opportunities in life according to their capabilities. There are specialised schools that assess the requirements and abilities of individuals in order that appropriate support can be given and, where appropriate, are taught the same curriculum as that of basic and post-basic education, adjusted as required to accommodate their needs. Special needs education is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education in co-operation with the Ministry of Social Development¹¹.

¹⁰ Cited by OAAA in internal SQA Briefing on 'Oman Context'

¹¹ Omandailyobserver,8 December 2015 pg. 3

2.1.3 Higher Education

Higher education in Oman is delivered by both public and private institutions. There are a variety of public higher education providers which include: one University; six Colleges of Applied Sciences; six regional Vocational Training Centres; one Higher College of Technology; six regional Colleges of Technology; two Fisheries Training Institutes; thirteen Health Institutes. There are also institutions under the supervision of the Ministry of Defence (such as the Military Technical College; the Armed Forces Medical School; the Institute of Topographical Science; the Sultan Qaboos Naval; the National Defence College; the Airforce Technical College; and the Command and Staff College); the Institute of Sharia Sciences; College of Sharia Sciences; the Higher Institute for Justice; and the College of Banking and Financial Studies. In addition, there are 27 private universities, university colleges and colleges.

Private higher education institutions comes under the Ministry of Higher Education. Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS) are supervised by the Directorate General of the CAS in the Ministry of Higher Education; the Ministry of Manpower looks after Higher Colleges of Technology and Colleges of Technology; Ministry of Defence looks after its institutions; Ministry of Health looks after the health institutes. The only public university in Oman Sultan, Qaboos University, is independent of the Ministry of Higher Education .

2.1.4 Technological and Vocational Education and Training

Technological and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) is delivered by both public and private institutions. The public institutions comprise: seven Colleges of Technology (six regional colleges and a Higher College of Technology¹²); six Vocational Training Centres (VTCs) and two Fisheries Training Institutes (FTIs). There are almost 400 private institutions. TVET is the responsibility of the Ministry of Manpower and is regarded as essential for people to acquire the right skills to meet labour market needs and also help them progress in their career. TVET is divided into two specific types:

- Technological Education;
- Vocational Training
 - Governmental Vocational Training Centres
 - Private Training Institutions.

¹² Already mentioned in section above.

2.1.4.1 Technological Education

Following post-basic education, technological education is higher education delivered by the formal educational institutions for a minimum of two years. It is higher education that includes educational preparedness, acquisition and attainment of technical knowledge and skills. Students exit with a Diploma of Technology (two years), an Advanced Diploma of Technology (three years) or a Bachelor of Technology (four years).

2.1.4.2 Vocational Training in Government Vocational Training Centres (VTCs)

Within training there is less emphasis on theory and more focus on manual skills¹³. There are three pathways for vocational training in Government VTCs:

- Vocational Diploma;
- Vocational Competency (changed to Apprenticeship in the new bylaw issued in September 2015);
- Short courses (changed to Vocational Training Courses in the new bylaw issued in September 2015);
- General Vocational Education Diploma (under development).

2.1.4.3 Vocational Diploma

The General Vocational Education Diploma is under development in collaboration with the Ministry of Education. It is comparable to the 11th and 12th Grades and can be undertaken after completion of grade 10 (this may be subject to change and in near future depending on decisions to be made). The General Vocational Education Diploma two-year course is comparable to a Diploma of Technology.

2.1.4.4 Apprenticeship

The duration of apprenticeships is in accordance with the occupations and ranges between 9 and 24 months, if offered as 1 program for companies. However, each level of Vocational Competency takes one academic year (nine months training).

¹³ www.freedictionary.com defines manual skills 'of or relating to a hand or hands *manual skills*'

2.1.4.5 Vocational Training Courses

Vocational Training Courses include those: designed to increase efficiency of workers; for rehabilitation purposes; or community development programs.

2.1.4.6 Vocational Training in Private Training Institutions

The Ministry of Manpower is responsible for supervising and checking the quality of the programs delivered in Private Training Institutions which are concerned with training in four fields: commercial; industrial; crafts and special programs. These institutions include:

- Private vocational training institutes;
- Private vocational training centres inside establishments;
- Private training services' offices;
- Training units at private educational institutions.

Different types of qualifications and certificates are offered in this sector through four training pathways as follows:

2.1.4.6.1 Occupational Programs (National Project Training Program (NPT Program))

The duration of these programs is in accordance with the occupations and range between 9 and 24 months. Trainees exit with a Certificate of Vocational Competency; semi-skilled, skilled or craftsman.

2.1.4.6.2 On-the-Job Training Programs (OJT)

On-the-Job training includes:

- OJT Shadowing System in company/industry (Certificate of Testament offered);
- OJT Private Training Institute/Centre (Certificates of Vocational Competency offered: semi-skilled, skilled, craftsman);
- OJT Vocational Training Centres: part of the apprenticeship.

2.1.4.6.3 Training Courses and Training Services

Training Courses and Training Services include training courses that award a Certificate of Participation (>25-600 hours) and Training Services that award a Course Certificate (<25 hours to 1 week).

2.1.4.6.4 Vocational Diploma

The Vocational Diploma from Private Training Institutions is under development. It is a two-year course and comparable to a Vocational Diploma (see 2.5.2.1) or a Diploma of Technology.

2.2 Demographics of Oman

According to Oman Ministry of National Economy (cited by Wikipedia¹⁴), the 2014 Census identified that the total population of Oman was 4,092,000 which comprised of 2,303,000 (56.3%) Omani and 1,789,000 (43.7%) expatriates. The 2014 Census revealed that most males are migrants from India (465,660), Bangladesh (107,125), or Pakistan (84,658). Female migrant workers are mainly from Indonesia (25,300), the Philippines (15,651), or Sri Lanka (10,178). Migrants from other Arab countries account for 68,986 of the population comprised of Egypt (29,877), Jordan (7403), Sudan (6867), UAE (6426), Iraq (4159), Saudi Arabia (725), Bahrain (388), Qatar (168) and other Asian countries (12,939). There were 8,541 migrants from Europe, 1,540 from the United States and 15,565 from other countries¹⁵.

2.2.1 Population

The UN figures¹⁶ reveal that Oman has a growing population. As indicated by the World Population Prospects (2010 Revision), the population has seen significant growth from the 1950s.

Table 1: Population Growth since 1950

Year	Population	- or +
1950	456,000	
1960	557,000	+22.1%
1970	732,000	+31.4%
1980	1,181,000	+61.3%
1990	1,868,000	+58.2%
2000	2,264,000	+21.2%
2010	2,782,000	+22.9%

¹⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Oman#Census_results.5B1.5D

¹⁵ *ibid*

¹⁶ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2.htm>

According to the World Population Review¹⁷ Oman Population Clock the population is projected to increase by 72,595 in 2016.

2.2.2 Age Groups

According to the UN figures¹⁸ it can be seen in Tables 2a and 2b that the demographics of Oman changed between 2009 and 2012. The breakdown of the population by age groups: 0-14; 15-64; and 65+ reveals that in 2014 there was a lower percentage of the population aged between 0-14 in 2012 than there was in 2009 and a greater percentage of older people in the 65+ bracket, suggesting an aging population.

Table 2a: Population by Age Group 2009

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Percent
0-14	394,354	377,426	771,780	24.32
15-64	1,551,055	802,097	2,353,152	74.14
65+	25,706	23,279	48,985	1.54

Table 2b: Population by Age Group 2012

Age Group	Male	Female	Total	Percent
0-14	408,162	390,971	799,133	22.06
15-64	1,873,040	854,838	2,727,878	75.29
65+	51,481	44,486	95,967	2.65

2.2.3 Literacy and Numeracy

Literacy and numeracy are described as being able to both read and write, with understanding, a short simple statement on everyday life. Generally, 'literacy' also encompasses 'numeracy', the ability to make simple arithmetic calculations. According to UNESCO Institute for Statistics 93.89% of the adult population (defined as aged 15 and above) are literate. The gender breakdown indicates that a higher rate of the male population is literate (96.88%) compared to that of the female adult population (89.97%). In terms of numbers this means that 43,722 adult males and

¹⁷ <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/oman-population/#>

¹⁸ <http://unstats.un.org/unsd/demographic/products/dyb/dyb2.htm>

107,351 adult females are illiterate¹⁹. With regards to literacy in youth, Knoema²⁰ indicated that in 2010 youth literacy (15-24 years) was 97.7%. However, literacy is improving in the Sultanate as the UNESCO 2015 figures²¹ suggest with now over 99% literacy rate in youth in 2014/15.

Table 3: UNESCO Literacy Rate % (2014/2015)

Age	Total	Male	Female	Year
15-24	99.13	99.13	99.12	2015
15 and older	94.76	96.88	89.97	2015
65 and older	73.27	75.72	70.72	2014

2.3 The Need for a Comprehensive NQF for Oman

The demography indicates that Oman has a growing population with the majority of people aged between 15 and 64. However there is also a growing number of those who are dependent on others. It can be seen in table 2b in section 2.2.2 that the population aged between 0-14 and 65+ is increasing, particularly in the 65+ age group, which increased from 48,985 in 2009 to 95,967 in 2012. This raises the rate of dependency of the young and the old on the working population and the need for those of working age to be employed and productive thereby making it essential that education and training providers develop programs that meet labour market needs in terms of content and level.

It can be seen that in Oman there are a range of higher education and vocational providers, both public and private operating in a dynamic educational environment. Within higher education an academic qualifications framework was established in 2003/2004 as part of the quality assurance mechanisms to provide consistency of higher education qualifications. This framework includes 'post-secondary school, academic qualifications'²² and it provides a reference point for OAAA and the higher education institutions in terms of the standards for academic programs, the levels and the minimum number of credit points/credit hours required. A qualifications framework does not exist for the TVET sector.

¹⁹ <http://countrymeters.info/en/Oman> (based on UNESCO latest data figures 2015)

²⁰ <http://knoema.com/atlas/Oman/topics/Education/Literacy/Youth-literacy-rate>

²¹ <http://www.uis.unesco.org/DataCentre/Pages/country-profile.aspx?regioncode=40525&code=OMN>

²² OAAA, (2014), *Development, Implementation and Maintenance of a National Qualifications Framework for Oman*, pg. 2

The limited scope of the academic OQF was recognised and the need for a comprehensive framework for all sectors was identified by the Education Council²³. This need was further emphasised in the joint report from the Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Education and the World Bank, entitled *Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality*²⁴.

The reasons why a comprehensive NQF is needed in Oman is summarised by OAAA²⁵. These are to:

- Integrate different levels and types of education, such as basic; post-basic; technical education and vocational training and higher education;
- Facilitate national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge;
- Organise qualifications into a single comprehensive system of levels, titles and standards;
- Develop greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications;
- Harmonise and enhance quality standards across the system;
- Encourage lifelong learning;
- Provide a system for recognising external qualifications.

3. REVIEW OF A RANGE OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORKS

Benchmarking activity was carried out to review NQFs from seven countries to give consideration to their aims, objectives, scope, type, and governance arrangements. Section 3.5 of the Benchmarking Activity Report provides a brief overview of each of the frameworks reviewed. Section 4 sets out the main features of each framework. In addition, where available, hyperlinks to the Handbooks of each framework are included in order that the reader can have easy access to further information on a particular framework, should it be required. However, in the first instance, it is useful to have some background information on the different types of qualifications frameworks to understand some of the differences (3.1 to 3.3).

3.1 Communication, Reformation and Transformation

David Raffe²⁶, from the University of Edinburgh identifies three types of frameworks which he calls:

²³ Sultanate of Oman, The Education Council (undated) *The Most Remarkable Projects Developed by the Education Council*

²⁴ Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Education and the World Bank (2012), *Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality, Summary Report*

²⁵ OAAA, (2014), *Development, Implementation and Maintenance of a National Qualifications Framework for Oman*

- Communications Frameworks;
- Reforming Frameworks; and
- Transformational Frameworks.

Communication frameworks (sometimes referred to as relational frameworks) aim to make the existing education system more transparent. Reforming frameworks aim for transparency but they also bring an element of reform to the existing education system. Transformational frameworks make radical changes to the education system. The features of each type of framework are described in the following tables:

Types of National Qualifications Frameworks:

Communication/Relational Framework	Reforming Framework	Transformational Framework
Starts from the existing qualifications system. Describes the existing system with the aim of making it 'more transparent'. Supports rationalisation and coherence.	Aims to make the existing qualifications system 'more transparent' but also aims to achieve specific reforms, for example to improve quality, update standards or fill any identified gaps.	Starts from the desired future qualifications system, aims for radical change
A tool for change rather than a driver for change.	A driver for change as well as a tool for change.	A driver for change as well as a tool for change.

Source: Adapted from presentation by Professor David Raffe on National Qualifications Frameworks at the National Council on Education, Santiago October 2013

3.2 Tracked, Linked and Unified Frameworks

NQFs are not only different in the effect that they have on the respective education system, they are also different in the level of `unification` of the education system that they have. Ron Tuck ²⁷ provides a description of these different levels which he describes as:

- Tracked;
- Linked; and
- Unified.

²⁶ <http://www.slideserve.com/cutler/communications-and-reforming-models-of-national-qualifications-frameworks-scotland-and-ireland>

²⁷ Tuck R., (2007) *An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks*, International Labour Organisation, pg21

In tracked frameworks Higher, Vocational and General Education are organised in separate and distinctive tracks. In linked frameworks, although different tracks exist, there is emphasis on similarities and equivalence or credit transfer between tracks. There are no tracks in a unified framework. Tuck goes on to explain that most countries have linked or unified systems or a hybrid of the two.

3.3 Tight and Loose Frameworks

NQFs also have different levels of control and these are described by Tuck as *Tight* and *Loose* frameworks. Tight frameworks control how qualifications are designed and quality assured and have common rules and procedures for all qualifications. Loose frameworks are based on general principles, accepting there are differences between the different education and training sectors.

Tight and Loose Frameworks:

Tight	Loose
Prescriptive about qualifications design and quality assurance; Regulatory purpose; Aims to achieve wider social goals; Tends to apply common rules and procedures across all qualifications;	Based on general principles; Communicating and enabling role; Regulate to some extent; Accept differences in approach where thought necessary.

Source: Tuck (2007) An Introductory Guide to National Qualifications Frameworks

3.4 Benchmarking Activity

As previously stated, benchmarking activity was carried out which reviewed seven NQFs. These were from:

- Australia (AQF)²⁸;
- Bahrain (NQFB)²⁹ ;
- Ireland (Irish NFQ);³⁰.
- Malaysia (MQF)³¹;
- New Zealand (NZQF)³²;
- Scotland (SCQF)³³;

²⁸ <http://www.aqf.edu.au/>

²⁹ <http://www.qqa.edu.bh/en/qaetunits/nqfu/pages/nqf.aspx>

³⁰ [http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-\(NFQ\).aspx](http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/National-Framework-of-Qualifications-(NFQ).aspx)

³¹ http://www.mqa.gov.my/dokumen/MALAYSIAN%20QUALIFICATIONS%20FRAMEWORK_2011.pdf

³² <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/understand-nz-quals>

- United Arab Emirates (QF Emirates)³⁴.

The review was carried out with the principal aim of gaining insight into areas that were common to most frameworks with respect to the:

- Key features related to different qualifications frameworks;
- Nature and purposes of different qualifications frameworks;
- Scope and levels of different frameworks;
- Different factors used within the level descriptors which describe the learning outcomes;
- Types of qualifications offered in each country; and
- Whether they were used in a particular sector (such as the current Oman Qualifications Framework for Higher Education) or for all education and training.

The outcome of the review was to identify and recommend important features to be built into a national qualifications framework for Oman. The aim in selecting these countries was to have a range of Gulf Co-operation Council (GCC) NQFs as well as Western examples. Six members of the OQF Development Team were divided into three groups, each of which examined two NQFs. A seventh member studied the Irish National Framework of Qualifications³⁵.

The OQF Development Team prepared a brief report on each of the NQFs which set out the main features of each framework in relation to the:

- Rationale and purpose of the NQF;
- Type of framework;
- Scope, levels and factors used in the level descriptors (also known in many European countries as generic learning outcomes);
- Range of qualifications; and
- Governance arrangements.

The information assembled was then examined for patterns and commonalities, and a range of features which were consistently found was identified. This information is set out in Sections 3.5 and 4 in this Benchmarking Activity Report along with the table in Appendix 3, which provides a summary

³³ <http://scqf.org.uk/>

³⁴ <http://www.nqa.gov.ae/En/Pages/default.aspx>

³⁵ The OQF Development Team's reports on the NQFs are held in the files of the OQF Project.

of the key features of each framework. The Appendix also provides a list of the qualifications offered in each country with the exception of Scotland (due to the number of qualifications available).

3.5 About the Seven NQFs

This section sets out the objectives of each framework, as promoted on the website of the relevant framework authority/body. Where available, the key messages which summarise the objectives and scope for the stakeholders and the general public are given.

3.5.1 Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) provides standards for Australian qualifications encompassing qualifications awarded in higher education, vocational education and training (VET) and schools. Although there is a qualification specification for the Secondary School Certificate, the qualification is not included in any of the framework levels. Therefore, it is qualification type which is not allocated to a specific level.

The overall objectives of the AQF, set out in the Australian Qualifications Framework (2013)³⁶, are to:

- Accommodate the diversity of purposes of Australian education and training now and into the future;
- Contribute to national economic performance;
- Support the development and maintenance of pathways within and between the education and training sectors;
- Support individuals' lifelong learning goals;
- Reinforce national regulatory and quality assurance arrangements for education and training;
- Support and enhance the national and international mobility of graduates and workers;
- Enable the alignment of the AQF with international qualifications frameworks.

Since 2014 the AQF has been managed by the Australian Government Department of Education and Training whose role is to:

³⁶ Australian Qualifications Framework, (2013) Second Edition, pg8

- Monitor and maintain the AQF;
- Support its users;
- Promote the AQF and its role in Australia’s education and training system³⁷.

Further information on the Australian Qualifications Framework can be found in the AQF Handbook which can be downloaded from following the link <http://www.aqf.edu.au/>

3.5.2 Bahrain

The NQF in Bahrain arose from a national desire for educational reform that offered increased coherence and transparency together with improvements in quality assurance. A number of challenges existed in the education system that the development of an NQF would address. These were:

- Inconsistency in the qualifications system;
- Absence of a system for comparing qualifications;
- The value of qualifications to learners and employers was unclear;
- Pathways of progressing between qualifications was unclear.

The vision for the NQF in Bahrain was to develop a framework across all sectors of education and training by achieving the goals as set out in the National Qualifications Framework Handbook for Institutions (2015)³⁸ which are to:

- Provide a stronger basis for the understanding, comparison and recognition of national and foreign qualifications thereby improving the understanding of employers, parents and learners of the values of qualifications;
- Provide fit-for-purpose qualifications that have stronger linkages to the labour market and learner needs;
- Increase the accountability of education and training institutions towards maintaining high-quality standards in their provision;
- Improve the opportunities for the mobility and progression of learners within and across higher education, vocational education and training and general education sectors;

³⁷ <http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf-governance/current-arrangements/>

³⁸ National Authority of Qualifications and Quality Assurance for Education and Training, National Qualifications Framework Handbook for Institutions, (2015) section 1.1, Pg. 13

- Promote the concept of lifelong learning through the recognition of all types of learning: formal, non-formal and informal.

By Royal Decree, in 2012, the organisation mandated to administer and maintain the NQF in Bahrain is the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance of Education and Training (QQA).

Further information on the NQF Handbook for Institutions provides further information on the NQF in Bahrain <http://www.qqa.gov.bh/En/QaaetUnits/NQFU/Pages/Related-Documents-.aspx>

3.5.3 Ireland

The National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) in Ireland was developed as a means of comparing qualifications at all levels of the education system. It includes qualifications from primary school, second level, further education and higher education institutions such as the Dublin Institute of Technology and universities. The NQF is defined as:

‘The single, nationally and internationally accepted entity, through which all learning achievements may be measured and related to each other in a coherent way and which defines the relationship between all education and training awards’.

The NFQ in Ireland was developed to serve several purposes:

- It ensures qualifications (awards) obtained in Ireland are quality assured and recognised internationally;
- It is part of a system for comparing Irish and international qualifications (awards);
- It supports lifelong learning by recognising learning outcomes within a comparative framework, even learning that takes place in non-formal and informal contexts;
- It provides a system of establishing eligibility for access, transfer and progression to learning opportunities;
- It recognises qualifications (awards) made by professional bodies.

NFQ Level Descriptors are used as the basis for designing new awards (qualifications). Awards (qualifications) are only placed on the NFQ when the Authority (QQI) is satisfied that the level and the quality assurance arrangements are appropriate.

The standards for school awards are set through a combination of the work of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) and the State Examinations Commission (SEC) with the approval/agreement of the Department of Education and Science.

Through legislation in 2012³⁹ a new agency, Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) was established which merged four existing agencies. These were the National Qualifications Authority Ireland; the Further Education Training Awards Council; the Higher Education Training Awards Council and the Irish Universities Quality Board. The role of QQI is to:

- Maintain the ten level NFQ;
- Be an awarding body and set standards for awards made on the NFQ;
- Validate education and training programs;
- Make awards in higher education (mainly for private providers as the universities and institutes of technology make their own awards);
- Advise on the recognition of foreign qualifications;
- Review the effectiveness of quality assurance in further and higher education providers in Ireland.

The standards for school awards are set by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment and the State Examinations Commission with approval from the Department of Education and Science.

Further information on NFQ's policies for Determining Awards Standards and Criteria for Making Awards can be found via the following link: <http://www.qqi.ie/Pages/NFQ-Standards-and-Guidelines-.aspx>

3.5.4 Malaysia

The Malaysian Qualifications Framework (MQF) was established in 2007. It is an instrument that develops and classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that are agreed nationally and benchmarked with international practices and which classifies the academic levels, learning outcomes and credit system based on student academic load⁴⁰. The MQF is benchmarked internationally against the main qualifications frameworks such as those of England, Wales and

³⁹ Qualifications and Quality Assurance (Education and Training) Act 2012

⁴⁰ www.mqa.gov.my/mobile/mqf.html

Northern Ireland, Australia, and New Zealand. The MQF contains post-secondary national qualifications, which are conferred in the skills, vocational and technical, academic and professional sectors⁴¹.

The eight levels of the MQF includes qualifications in three national higher education sectors⁴².

The sectors are:

- Skills;
- Vocational and Technical;
- Academic.

The levels of the MQF are differentiated by learning outcomes, credit hours and student learning time. The MQF supports lifelong learning as credit transfer and accreditation of prior learning is available for all levels of qualifications⁴³.

One of the main features of the MQF is the Malaysian Qualifications Register (MQR).

Its purpose is to ensure that accredited higher education qualifications are registered and made available for reference to all stakeholders⁴⁴. Therefore, MQR is the reference point for accredited programs awarded by higher education providers. All higher education qualifications must conform to the requirements of the MQF.

Legislation in 2007 resulted in the establishment of the Malaysian Qualifications Authority whose main functions are to:

- Implement the MQF as a reference point for Malaysian qualifications;
- Maintain the MQR;
- Develop standards and credits and all other relevant instruments as national references for the conferment of awards with the co-operation of stakeholders;
- Quality assure higher education providers and programs;
- Accredite programs that fulfil the set criteria and standards;

⁴¹ Aic.lv/bologna/2010/sem09-10

⁴² <http://www.mqa.gov.my/portalMQA/default/en/mqf.cfm>

⁴³ <http://www.mqa.gov.my/mobile/mqf.html>

⁴⁴ Mqa.gov.my/mgr/English/eperutusan.cfm

- Facilitate the recognition and articulation of qualifications.

Information on the Malaysian Qualifications Framework is available in the MQF Handbook which can be obtained via the following link <http://www.mqa.gov.my/>

3.5.5 New Zealand

The first qualifications framework in New Zealand was developed in 1992. It was known as the NQF. In 2010 the NQF and the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications was replaced by the New Zealand Qualifications Framework (NZQF)⁴⁵. The NZQF is designed to:

- Provide a simple structure for qualifications in New Zealand;
- Convey the skills, knowledge and attributes a graduate has gained through completing a qualification;
- Require the development of integrated and coherent qualifications that meet the needs of individuals, groups, industry and the community;
- Enable and support the provision of high quality education pathways;
- Enhance confidence in the quality and international comparability of New Zealand qualifications;
- Contribute to Maori success in education by recognising and advancing Maturanga Maori;
- Represent value for money, is sustainable and robust.

The NZQF is based on learning outcomes and is designed to provide recognition for educational achievement. The NZQF handbook⁴⁶ states that it `contributes to the country's economic, social and cultural success`.

The NZQF includes qualifications achieved in all learning contexts including: on-the-job training; within education institutions; on-line; and distance learning.

⁴⁵ www.nzqa.govt.nz

⁴⁶ NZQF Handbook page 2

The responsibility for the integrity, currency and accuracy of the NZQF lies with the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) who has the remit to:

- Manage the NZQF;
- Administer the Secondary School Assessment system;
- Carry out independent quality-assurance of non-university education providers;
- Provide qualifications recognition and standard setting for some specified unit standards;
- Standard-setting for some specified unit standards⁴⁷.

Responsibility for the quality assurance of the university sector lies with Universities New Zealand⁴⁸.

NZQA reports to the Minister of Education and the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills and Employment.⁴⁹

A key deliverable of the NZQA was a Targeted Review of Qualifications (TRoQ). This took place in 2010 for qualifications at levels 1-6. The Review was brought about by research in 2008-2009 which found that the qualifications system:

- Was not relevant to some employers and industry;
- Was not user-friendly and the status of qualifications was unclear;
- Contained a large number of similar qualifications which made distinguishing between them and identifying education and career pathways difficult⁵⁰.

TRoQ requires qualifications to have clear and structured graduate outcomes, including a graduate profile as well as education and employment pathways. The aim of TRoQ was to rationalise all qualifications at Level 6 and below to reduce duplication and establish consistency.

⁴⁷ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/about-us/our-role/>

⁴⁸ *ibid*

⁴⁹ *ibid*

⁵⁰ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-n-new-zealand/understand-nz-quals/targeted-review-of-qualifications/>

These changes have:

- Streamlined and simplified the qualifications system as a single location for all qualifications;
- Made it easier to find information; and
- Avoided duplication and the proliferation of qualifications⁵¹.

Further information on the way in which qualifications are included on the NZQF can be found on <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/studying-in-new-zealand/understand-nz-quals/nzqf/>

3.5.6 Scotland

The aims of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) are set out in the 2015 edition of the SCQF Handbook⁵². The Framework aims to:

- Help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- Enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand:
 - the full range of Scottish qualifications;
 - how they relate to each other;
 - how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce;
 - how Scottish qualifications relate to qualifications in other countries;
 - how using SCQF Level Descriptors can assist with qualifications development and benchmarking skills and experience in all sectors.

The SCQF includes:

- School qualifications;
- Qualifications offered in further education;
- Higher education qualifications;
- Vocational qualifications;
- Learning programs from a wide variety of learning providers such as employers, community education and voluntary organisations⁵³.

⁵¹ ibid

⁵² Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, SCQF Handbook (2015) pg6

The SCQF is a voluntary framework and as such has no legislation. The framework is managed by the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership which is a company limited by guarantee and a registered charity in Scotland. It has a Board of Directors comprised of senior representatives from the member organisations which are the:

- Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education;
- College Development Network;
- Scottish Qualifications Authority;
- Universities Scotland⁵⁴.

Information on the way in which the SCQF recognises learning is contained in the SCQF Handbook at the following link <http://scqf.org.uk/search/scqf+handbook>

3.5.7 United Arab Emirates

Established in 2012, the purpose of the Qualifications Framework Emirates (QFEmirates) is to serve as the national frame of reference for qualifications. The key drivers of the QFEmirates are to provide:

- **A single framework** to 'facilitate the work of the country's decision makers in developing relevant strategic educational and training policies and directions;
- **A common benchmark** to 'add structure and order to the current system which is comprised of a wide variety of qualifications' and to develop a common language among educational institutions and the communities they serve';
- **Qualifications flexibility** to ensure that qualifications have the 'flexibility to accommodate changing technologies and changing workplace environments';
- **Labour Market** to enable representatives from industry, government and educational institutions to plan programs that prepare individuals for employment in areas where there are skills shortages;
- **Quality and Consistency** to address the need for improved and transparent quality assurance mechanisms to assure quality, consistency and rigour of educational programs;

⁵³ <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/search-database/>

⁵⁴ <http://scqf.org.uk/about-us/scqf-partnership-executive-team/>

- **Mobility and portability** to develop qualifications that are portable to enhance learner mobility in the UAE and internationally;
- **Lifelong Learning** to develop transparent mechanisms for the award of credit for formal and non-formal learning⁵⁵.

The aims of the QFEmirates as set out on its website⁵⁶ are to:

- Design plans and policies, and develop a comprehensive and unified national strategy for qualifications;
- Establish and continuously maintain standards and regulations for qualifications of higher education, general education and technical, vocational and professional education and training to keep pace with scientific and technological progress, and to meet the requirements of economic and social development;
- Develop policies and procedures for qualifications of higher education, general education and vocational, technical and professional education and training so as to obtain national and international accreditation (recognition);
- Develop and maintain systems, processes and procedures to assess learning outcomes that serve as the basis for awarding qualifications;
- Issue equivalencies for higher education, general education and vocational, technical, and professional education and training qualifications;
- Assess and accredit higher education, general education and vocational, technical, and professional education and training providers;
- Develop policies and procedures for access, transfer and progression of individuals within higher education, general education and vocational, technical, and professional education and training streams inside and outside the country;
- Advise individuals and entities to promote the concept of lifelong learning;
- Establish and maintain systems, processes and procedures to ensure that the National Qualifications Framework is the national frame of reference for qualifications in the country;

⁵⁵ Extracts from the Qualifications Framework Emirates Handbook and Implementation of QFEmirates in Higher Education: a Guide for External Review Teams November 2012

⁵⁶ <http://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/AboutUs/pages/NAQaims.aspx>

- Analyze and provide qualifications-relevant data, and submit proposals to relevant entities, to improve the quality of higher education, general education and vocational, technical and professional education and training systems;
- Establish specialized committees to develop national occupational (skills) standards for all jobs in compliance with the National Qualifications Framework levels;
- Develop and maintain an integrated system to license assessors of vocational, technical and professional education and training qualifications;
- Support the efforts of all entities responsible for assessing and regulating workforce quality;
- Establish and maintain a national database for all education and training providers in the country, to include learners, accredited (recognized) national qualifications and national occupational (skills) standards;
- Conduct studies and periodic evaluations, to improve the overall performance of the national qualifications system.

The QFEmirates is managed by the National Qualifications Authority⁵⁷. Further information on the QFEmirates is contained in the QFEmirates Handbook which can be accessed at <https://www.nqa.gov.ae/en/QFEmirates/QualificationsFramework/Pages/default.aspx>

4. KEY FEATURES OF THE NQFS STUDIED IN THE BENCHMARKING ACTIVITY

Synthesising the data gathered in the reports on the NQFs of the seven countries⁵⁸ it was possible to discern trends and patterns, in relation to the purposes and objectives set for these frameworks, the type of framework and the scope of their remits. The synthesised data is provided in Appendix 3.

4.1 Purposes and Objectives of the Frameworks

All seven frameworks have a basic purpose of **classifying and comparing qualifications** in the national sphere. Six of the seven also address the task of providing **international benchmarks** for their qualifications and some also identify the framework as the **referent for international**

⁵⁷ ibid

⁵⁸ Australia, Bahrain, Ireland, Malaysia, New Zealand, Scotland and the United Arab Emirates

alignments. SCQF does not have a process of alignment. International qualifications are included in the framework in the same way as all other qualifications, through the process of credit rating. Most countries have the **objective of underpinning new qualifications design** and the **improvement of mobility or progression for learners.**

Comparison of Frameworks: classification, international, qualification design, mobility and progression

Framework	Classify and compare qualifications	International benchmarks/ alignment	Underpins new qualifications design	Improves mobility and progression
AQF	✓	✓	✓	✓
NQF (Bahrain)	✓	✓	✓	✓
NFQ (Ireland)	✓	✓	✓	✓
MQF	✓			
NZQF	✓	✓	✓	✓
SCQF	✓	✓	✓	✓
QF Emirates	✓	✓	✓	✓

4.2. Types of Frameworks

Although the governance arrangements vary among the frameworks, in each country there is a **single national responsible authority or governing body**, the governing bodies for the NQFs are not related to any specific sector of education/training (See Appendix 3). Most frameworks are **regulatory frameworks**; the Scottish SCQF is an outlier in this respect as it is a voluntary framework.

The structure of each of the frameworks is built on **level descriptors** which describe learning outcomes. The number of levels differs as these are generally derived from the country’s education system.

Comparison of frameworks: Types:

Framework	Relational/ Communication	Reforming	Transforming	Regulatory	Voluntary	Levels
AQF	✓	✓		✓		10
NQF (Bahrain)	✓	✓		✓		10
NFQ (Ireland)			✓	✓		10
MQF		✓		✓		8

NZQF	✓	✓		✓		10
Scotland	✓	✓			✓	12
QF Emirates	✓	✓		✓		10

4.3 Scope

With regard to the scope of the frameworks, six of the seven countries include qualifications from higher education, vocational education and training, and schools. The Malaysian Framework only includes post-secondary qualifications/awards. Providing the criteria is met, the SCQF includes a range of other learning provision (referred to as learning programs) which are developed and awarded by bodies such as employers and community groups⁵⁹

Six of the seven frameworks refer explicitly to the need to relate to **lifelong learning** and have arrangements for the **recognition of prior learning (RPL)** and **credit transfer (CAT)** albeit that these may be at different stages of development.

Comparison of Frameworks: sectors included, lifelong learning, RPL and CAT

Framework	Higher Education	TVET/VET	Schools / General Education	Lifelong Learning	RPL and CAT
AQF	✓	✓	✓	✓	
NQF (Bahrain)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
NFQ (Ireland)	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
MQF	✓	✓		✓	✓
NZQF	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Scotland	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
QF Emirates	✓	✓	✓		✓

⁵⁹ www.scaf.org.uk/search the database

4.4 Other Commonalities

- All frameworks refer to generic (non-subject-specific) level descriptors (referred to by some NQFs as learning outcomes); some are more detailed and elaborate than others;
- The focus of the level descriptors is generally on three areas: knowledge, skills, and competence. However, competence is referred to differently within the frameworks. The factors/characteristics/sub-strands of the level descriptors for each framework is given in Appendix 3;
- The design of each framework is driven by the national desire to meet the needs of learners and the labour market.

4.5 Reflection on the Review of Frameworks

It can be seen that there are aspects of NQFs that are common to all and most are relational frameworks that have reformed their country's education system in some way. Nevertheless, the nature and extent of the reform differs.

It can be seen from the review that SCQF is a communications/relational framework, which was its principal aim, but over time it has influenced some reforms to the education system for example to qualification titles. However, the nature of reform in some other frameworks has been much more prevalent such as in Bahrain and the NFQ in Ireland which transformed the education systems. This is because the reasons for developing a framework were very different. The reason for the development of the SCQF was to increase transparency which was reflected in its aims⁶⁰:

- Help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential;
- Enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.⁶¹

⁶⁰ The aims changed slightly in 2015. See section 3.5.6.

⁶¹ SCQF Handbook 2009 edition

One of the reasons for the development of the framework in Bahrain was to bring consistency to the qualifications offered there, ensuring that they were fit-for-purpose. The NFQ in Ireland is a transformational framework which contributed to the broad reform of the qualifications system.

The economic context in New Zealand was a driver for the development of the New Zealand NQF (Allias 2010).⁶² She describes a period of high youth unemployment which led to economic restructuring, to which the development of the New Zealand NQF was one of the contributors.

The eight level NQF was introduced in 1991 with the intention that:

‘all forms of education and training would adopt a common system of measuring and recording learning, based on unit standards’⁶³

However, this was unsuccessful as the higher education sector and others opposed the changes and refused to implement them. In the late ‘90s a major rethink took place which, in 2001, led to the introduction of a Register of Quality Assured Qualifications. Further reform took place in 2010 when the NZQF replaced both the NQF and the Register.

The different purposes influenced the governance of these NQFs and also influenced how they operate e.g. how ‘tight’ or ‘loose’ they are, how qualifications are included and the quality assurance arrangements. ‘Buy-in’ and a feeling of ‘ownership’ from stakeholders is also important, as indicated by the situation in New Zealand. It is not a unique situation for a framework to be developed and needed to be reformed after a few years⁶⁴.

The scope of the frameworks also differs. The **desk research** indicated that RPL and credit transfer feature in six of the seven frameworks but the extent of implementation of this varies from country to country. For some the processes/guidelines are developed but are somewhat patchy in their implementation and for others RPL is an aspiration for the future. However, such information is not available on the websites and is only obtained through ‘expert’ knowledge, study visits and discussions. The benchmarking activity should influence decisions on the framework that should be considered for study visits, and the questions that should be asked, to gain more in-depth information on what is actually working in practice.

⁶² Allias S., (2010) *The implementation and impact of National Qualifications Frameworks: Report of a study in 16 countries*, International Labour Office, Geneva.

⁶³ Ibid pg. 32

⁶⁴ The Qualifications Credit Framework in England, Wales and Northern Ireland is another example.

The culture and traditions of the country in which the NQF is being developed also have an influence. For example, while there is regulation within the education system in Scotland, the SCQF operates in a culture of trust and consensus which would be inappropriate in cultures where regulation and compliance are more appropriate.

Therefore, a number of factors influence the development of a national qualifications framework. Vital decisions are required on the reasons for its development as this will influence future decisions on its functions, structure, governance and operation. The `buy-in` from stakeholders is vital to avoid opposition. Stakeholders will be required to implement the framework so it should not be developed in a vacuum without extensive consultation.

5. INDICATIONS FROM OMANI POLICY SOURCES

There are clear indications from the aforementioned policy documents in Oman as to the purposes a comprehensive OQF should fulfil. A Directive was issued which can be found in the 2010 Decree (54/2010)⁶⁵ which is further supported in the decision letter from the Education Council in March 2014. This refers to the establishment of a comprehensive NQF to include higher education, technological and vocational education and training (TVET), professional, and general basic education qualifications.

As previously indicated in this Benchmarking Activity Report, a number of requirements for the OQF were identified in the OAAA Project Proposal. These were to:

- Integrate different levels and types of education, such as basic; post-basic; technical education and vocational training and higher education;
- Facilitate national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge;
- Organise qualifications into a single comprehensive system of levels, titles and standards;
- Develop greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications;
- Harmonise and enhance quality standards across the system;
- Encourage lifelong learning;
- Provide a system for recognising external qualifications;

⁶⁵ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/default.aspx>

- Improve quality⁶⁶.

The joint report from the Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Education and The World Bank, *The Drive for Quality*, recommends a comprehensive national qualifications framework to:

- Allow course comparison⁶⁷;
- Facilitate transitions among pathways⁶⁸;
- Improve quality⁶⁹;
- Achieve access for all⁷⁰;
- Develop strategies for special needs education⁷¹;
- Link educational outcomes to the needs of the labour market⁷²;
- Increase flexibility within the education system⁷³.

Within the Education Council's report⁷⁴ additional challenges in the education system were identified which require to be addressed:

- The need to link educational outcomes to the needs of the labour market (introduction);
- Weakness in the structure of qualifications in higher education (technical education);⁷⁵ and
- Lack of standards in the vocational training curriculum.

5.1 Potential Contribution of the Oman Qualifications Framework

The OQF will be a very useful tool to contribute to the improvement of the education and training systems in Oman, particularly in the areas set out in Section 5. However, a qualifications framework cannot operate in isolation. There may be other requirements, either national or institutional, that need to be put in place. For example, some countries may use their qualification framework as a tool in the recognition of prior learning (RPL); however, where the regulatory requirements of the

⁶⁶ Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Education and the World Bank, *Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality*, Summary Report (2012) pg. 18 and 30

⁶⁷ Sultanate of Oman, Ministry of Education and the World Bank, *Education in Oman: The Drive for Quality*, Main Report, pg. 245

⁶⁸ Ibid pg.245

⁶⁹ Ibid pg. 245

⁷⁰ Ibid pg. 254

⁷¹ Ibid pg. 242

⁷² Ibid pg. 237

⁷³ Ibid pg. 245

⁷⁴ The Sultanate of Oman Education Council (Undated) *The Most Remarkable Projects Developed by the Education Council*

⁷⁵ Ibid section D, *Study on the diversification of higher education provision and how it can meet the needs of the society and the requirements of the labour market*

education system generally do not accommodate RPL it will be difficult to implement. Therefore, the success of an NQF may require that regulations, often controlled by other agencies, need to be adapted/amended. Likewise, there must also be change at the institutional and program levels if the NQF is to have a meaningful effect in bringing about change.

The table, included in this section, sets out the reasons for the development of the OQF as given in the policy documents and an indication of how the OQF might contribute to the required changes, along with an indication of other requirements/decisions that need to be taken or put into place. These are not exclusive but are included to illustrate the decisions that need to be made.

Potential benefits of the OQF and related requirements/decisions:

Requirements from the OQF	How a framework might contribute (not exclusive)	Other requirements and/or decisions required (not exclusive)
Integrate different levels and types of education, such as basic; post-basic; technical education and vocational training and higher education.	Develop a linked or unified framework or a hybrid of these two depending on the agreement reached in Oman.	Strategic decision required on the type of framework that is best suited to Oman and to what extent it will be centrally controlled.
Organise qualifications into a single comprehensive system of levels, titles and standards.	Framework includes qualifications from school, academic, TVET and professional qualifications.	Consultation and communication required to gain support from all education systems. Strategic decision on the statutory requirements necessary to implement OQF.
Facilitate national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge. Encourage lifelong learning.	Develop a framework which can accommodate not just formal qualifications but also such learning provision as employers' training programs and community programs providing they meet the OQF quality assurance requirements and criteria for placement on the OQF.	Strategic decision required on the learning and training provision that will be included on the OQF.
	Develop guidelines/regulations on RPL to enable individual institutions (or develop national recognition centres) to develop their processes and procedures to facilitate RPL and credit transfer.	Regulatory bodies' policies must accommodate the recognition of prior learning. Strategic decision required on national recognition centres. Institutions must develop policies and procedures for the implementation of RPL. There are resource implications in terms of finance and staff.

Requirements from the OQF	How a framework might contribute (not exclusive)	Other requirements and/or decisions required (not exclusive)
		Attitudinal change also required.
	Develop a credit system.	All education and training Institutions/providers use a national credit system. Implications in terms of resources for capacity building for all education and training providers.
Develop greater parity of esteem between academic and vocational qualifications.	Use one set of level descriptors to determine the level of academic and vocational qualifications.	All education and training providers use one set of generic level descriptors which have been consulted on and agreed by stakeholders representing all sectors of education and training.
	Develop a credit system which enables the transfer of credit for example from vocational qualifications to academic qualifications and vice versa.	Regulatory requirements need to accommodate credit transfer. Resource and capacity building implications
		Institutions must develop and implement policies and procedures for credit transfer, which are understandable to learners so as not to present an additional barrier.
Harmonise and enhance quality standards across the system.	Develop quality assurance mechanisms for the inclusion of all academic and vocational qualifications to be placed on the framework.	Strategic decision required on the management of the OQF and its associated functions such as the quality assurance requirements for institutions and the criteria for programs/qualifications to be placed on the framework.
Improve quality.		All providers required to implement agreed quality standards and agreed criteria for qualifications/programs.
Address weakness in the structure of qualifications in higher		Implications for resources and for developing understanding of all

Requirements from the OQF	How a framework might contribute (not exclusive)	Other requirements and/or decisions required (not exclusive)
education (technical education).		education and training providers and capacity building.
Address lack of standards in the vocational training curriculum.		
Provide a system for recognising external qualifications.	Develop processes for including or aligning external qualifications to the framework. Reference the OQF to international frameworks.	All stakeholders and learners made aware of the processes for the recognition of external qualifications. Seek agreement with international framework authorities/bodies regarding referencing to their frameworks.
Allow course/qualification comparison.	Develop level descriptors which describe generic outcomes at each level.	All education and training providers need to be aware of the level descriptors and must use them to develop new qualifications and for placing existing qualifications onto the OQF.
	Ensure that all qualifications placed on the OQF are written in learning outcomes.	All education and training providers must use learning outcomes. Implications of capacity building on the development of learning outcomes for all providers. It must be recognised that this will take time and resources.
Facilitates transitions among pathways.	Facilitates the development of programs to provide progression pathways for learners. Also facilitates the development of articulation routes.	Requires collaboration between providers to develop articulation routes between qualifications. It has an implication to ensure learners' and guidance professionals understand articulation and progression pathways.
Increase flexibility within the education system.	Require that all programs which lead to qualifications included on the OQF are written in courses/modules/units.	All education and training providers develop new qualifications or revise existing qualifications with programs based on courses/ modules/units. It must be recognised that this will be a long term goal that will take capacity building and resources.

Requirements from the OQF	How a framework might contribute (not exclusive)	Other requirements and/or decisions required (not exclusive)
	Develop processes which enable admission with advanced standing. Also develop processes to enable early exit at relevant points for those who are unable to continue their studies (for whatever reason).	Regulations are adjusted to allow for admission of students with advanced standing and for students to exit at relevant points with a recognised qualification. All education and training providers develop and implement policies and procedures with regard to entry with advanced standing and with relevant exit points.
Achieve access for all.	Facilitate the development of qualifications which recognise basic achievement and which enable individuals to gain the required skills to enable them to return to/progress in their learning.	Awarding bodies (and other responsible bodies as appropriate) develop qualifications which provide recognition of basic achievement and provide the skills required by adult returners to education and to the labour market.
Develop strategies for special needs education.		
Link educational outcomes to needs of the labour market.	Ensure that all academic and vocational qualifications placed on the OQF meet labour market needs but also meet the needs of learners.	When developing new qualifications all awarding bodies (with the support of the relevant education and training providers) provide evidence of meeting labour market (and learner) needs.
Provide a comparison to international qualifications frameworks.	Reference the OQF to other international framework to provide a level-to-level comparison.	Identify the qualifications framework(s) which is/are most advantageous to reference. Obtain the permission and the co-operation of the framework authorities.

Synthesising the information gathered in the Benchmarking Activity, the key features for the OQF were identified which are that the OQF should:

- Be a statutory entity;
- Be a comprehensive NQF which:
 - can recognise basic achievement; and
 - includes qualifications from all sectors of education and training;
 - includes professional qualifications and awards made for learning achieved through continuing professional development;
- Use a credit system;

- Be designed with procedures to include foreign qualifications (awarded in Oman) or otherwise align such qualifications to the framework;
- Facilitate the Recognition of Prior Learning;
- Be a single reference point within Oman for all qualifications;
- Facilitate international referencing (comparison) of international frameworks and qualifications (not awarded in Oman);
- Be used as the basis for qualifications design.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONSULTATION

Taking account of the: results from the review of the national qualifications frameworks developed in other countries⁷⁶; analysis of available policy and strategy documents in Oman that are relevant to the objective of developing the OQF; characteristics and needs of the Oman education system and labour market, and the purpose of the Benchmarking Activity to identify good practice and provide recommendation on a range of key features for the OQF (as set out in section 3).

As Governance of the OQF is a complex matter this will be the subject of separate consultations and subsequent report on the matter, therefore, no recommendations on governance were included.

The key recommendations for the OQF was that it should be a framework that:

- Classifies all qualifications in Oman;
- Provides an international reference point for Omani qualifications; and
- Supports the development of new qualifications in the future.

This could be described as a relational framework with some reforming potential (see 3.1).

Based on the recommendations for the **Key Features of the OQF**, further recommendations were made (Sections 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3 respectively) with regard to the:

- Objectives of the OQF;
- Scope of the OQF; and
- Basic design criteria for the OQF.

⁷⁶ As set out in section 3.5, section 4, section 5.1 and Appendix 3

6.1 Objectives of the OQF

The key overarching objective is that the OQF should be the leading element in a process of building a more flexible system of qualifications in Oman, capable of responding to the changes that will arise from globalisation, the modernisation of the economy in Oman and the emerging labour market trends. It is therefore recommended that this future-oriented system should be focused on meeting the needs of learners and employers.

To meet this broad objective, it is recommended that the OQF:

- Provides a clear and consistent means of describing and comparing all qualifications in Oman, inclusive of basic education, school education, TVET, higher education and professional sectors;
- Provides a benchmark and reference point for the recognition in Oman of foreign qualifications and for the recognition of Omani qualifications abroad;
- Provides a structure that can support the:
 - development of new qualifications to consistent standards, based on learning outcomes;
 - introduction of qualifications recognising the achievement of relatively small sets of learning outcomes; and
 - revision of existing qualifications as required.
- Supports and strengthens the on-going development of processes for quality assurance in education and training;
- Provides a frame of reference for a wide range of TVET qualifications;
- Provides a design basis for new qualifications;
- Supports the parity of esteem between qualifications awarded for learning in TVET and in higher education;
- Clarifies the routes by which learners can progress through the systems of qualifications in Oman, and supports the development of new, more flexible progression possibilities for learners;
- Supports the reform of the qualifications systems in Oman so that they will provide appropriate recognition of learning outcomes achieved. Such reforms could include the

use of credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) and processes for the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

While these direct objectives should be the primary influence on the design of the OQF, it is also important to take account of the many potential wider uses and benefits of a national qualifications framework in Oman:

- The OQF will be a significant resource for the bodies engaged in the processes of licensing and accrediting providers of education and training;
- The OQF will have significant potential in offering an effective benchmark for the evaluation of foreign qualifications.

6.2 Scope of the OQF

With regard to the scope of the OQF, it is recommended that:

- As the single structure for the comprehensive classification of qualifications in Oman, the OQF will include all quality-assured qualifications in school education, TVET and higher education and professional qualifications. (The quality assurance process for the inclusion of qualifications on the framework is to be developed later in the project);
- It will allow for the recognition of international qualifications and it is proposed that these are included in, or aligned with, the OQF, as far as possible;
- It will allow for the development and inclusion of unit-based or credit-based qualifications designed to suit modular education programs;
- The National Qualifications Framework for Higher Education⁷⁷ is already well established within the higher education sector in Oman, under the aegis of the OAAA. It is envisaged that this framework will be embedded in the OQF and the qualifications awarded in higher education in Oman will be incorporated into the overall structure of levels of the OQF;
- The OQF will support lifelong learning in Oman as it will relate to all qualifications, including those awarded for learning achievements in schools, training centres, the workplace, and higher education institutions from the most basic to the most advanced

⁷⁷ <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/Framework.aspx>

levels of learning. Also, the framework sets out to encompass recognition for learning in all settings: formal learning; non-formal and informal learning;

- The framework will allow for the development of qualifications that provide appropriate recognition for the learning achievement of those with special needs and adults returning to basic education.

6.3 Basic Design Criteria for the OQF

Based on the recommendation on the scope of the framework (see 6.2) and to meet the objectives outlined in 6.1, the proposed model for the OQF is for a framework with reforming potential, designed to address multiple functions. It is therefore recommended that the OQF meets the following design criteria:

The OQF should:

- Be a statutory entity and it should be mandatory for all qualifications awarded in Oman to be included in the framework, or aligned to it;
- Be a structure of levels with level descriptors which define the expected outcomes at each level;
- Have an associated table of definitions of key terminology.

These will provide a frame of reference, domestically and internationally, for existing qualifications and will provide a basis for the design of new qualifications of widely varying specifications.

The OQF should:

- Have policies and procedures to define and regulate its installation and implementation in the education and training systems of Oman to address:
 - additional classification and descriptive instruments that may be employed in the OQF, such as conventions on award titles, use of credit rating, classification by learning sector;
 - the mechanisms for the inclusion of qualifications including professional qualifications in the framework;
 - arrangements for the maintenance of a register of the qualifications in the OQF;
 - policies to promote learner mobility and progression through a system of qualifications;

- arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL).

6.4 Consultation on the Recommendations

In January 2016, a questionnaire on the recommendations contained within the Benchmarking Activity Report was developed in order to ascertain the views of stakeholders. As the principal means of dissemination and consultation, the Benchmarking Activity Report was discussed at the meeting of the Oversight Committee held on 13 January 2016. The questionnaire on the recommendations was subsequently disseminated to all Oversight Committee members with the aim that they would disseminate and seek the views of others within their organisation and associated networks. The questionnaire is attached as Appendix 4. Twenty-six responses were received, the analysis of which is included in Section 7.

7. ANALYSIS OF FEEDBACK

This chapter provides a synthesis of the feedback on the recommendations on the proposed key features, scope and objectives of the OQF. The questionnaire, attached as Appendix 4, was distributed to the Oversight Committee in January 2016.

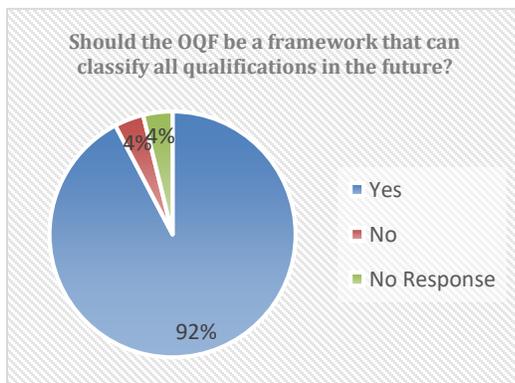
A total of 26 responses were received from members of the Oversight Committee and their associated networks. Respondents were from:

- The Secretariat General of the Education Council
- The Research Council
- Ministry of Higher Education (3)
- Ministry of Education (3)
- Ministry of Manpower (2)
- Ministry of Health (4)
- RAFO Ministry of Defence
- Sultan Qaboos University
- A'Sharqiyah University
- Sur University College
- Oman Dental College
- Dhofar University
- German University of Technology in Oman

- Bayan College
- Mazoon College
- Sarooj Group
- Oman Speciality Board
- Unknown (1)

7.1 Analysis of Feedback

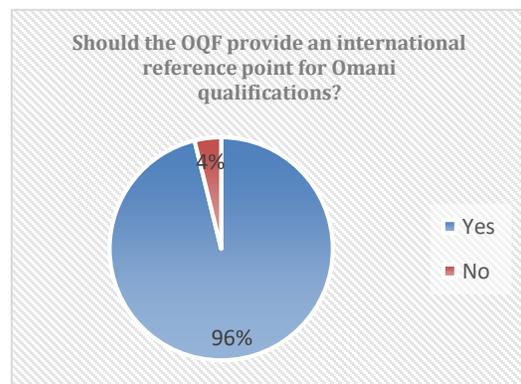
7.1.1 Should the OQF be a Framework that can classify all qualifications in the future?



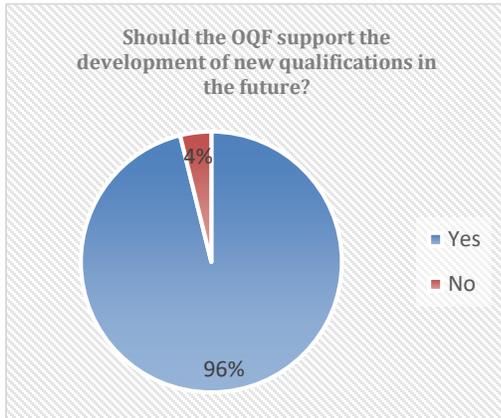
Twenty-four `yes` responses were received, one `no` response and one did not respond. The general view was that classifying qualifications would be extremely helpful to learners and employers and would improve communication between training and employment. However, the `no` respondent cautioned that this could be difficult given the wide range of qualifications offered in Oman.

7.1.2 Should the OQF provide an international reference point for Omani qualifications?

Twenty-five `yes` responses and one `no` response were received. The OQF as an international reference point was viewed positively. The comments received suggest that this is for three reasons: a) to enable the Omani students to use their qualifications abroad; b) to facilitate the comparison between local qualifications and international ones; and c) to harmonise quality standards across the system in line with international qualifications.



7.1.3 Should the OQF support the development of new qualifications in the future?

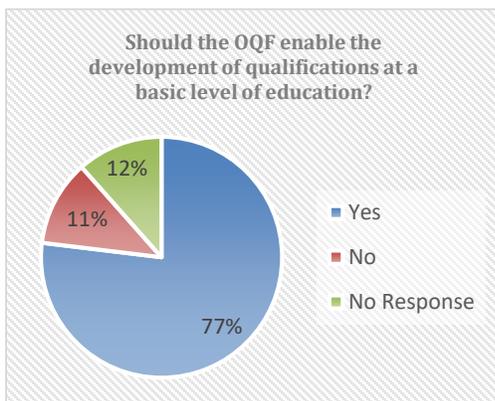


Twenty-five 'yes' responses and one 'no' response were received. Although in favour of this recommendation respondents expressed the view that this should be done 'only when necessary'; this was 'a work in progress' and should be done incrementally; another suggested that this take place in coordination with changes to institutional and program standards.

7.1.4 Should the OQF provide a clear and consistent means of describing and comparing all qualifications in Oman?

There was 100% agreement with this proposal. The view of respondents was that this would be very useful for employment, staffing and would provide flexibility and mobility. It was suggested that clear policy aims are developed which are understood and accepted by a wide range of stakeholders and another suggested a guide book be developed with the policies and procedures to be followed. One suggestion was that there should be 'principles and guidelines' by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge'.

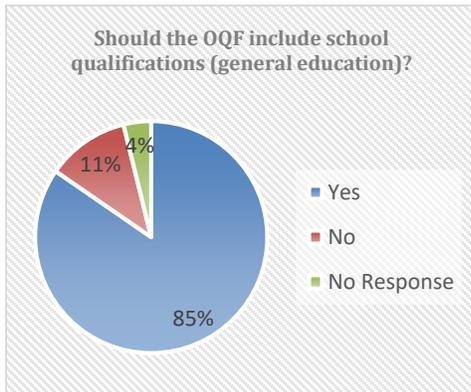
7.1.5 Should the OQF enable the development of qualifications at a basic level of education?



Twenty 'yes' responses were received; three 'no' responses. Three viewed the question as being unclear so did not respond. Two respondents stated that the OQF should be for 'all levels'. The view of three respondents in support of this proposal described the provision of basic education as 'badly needed', 'a great need' and 'important'. One respondent commented that 'it should go beyond that in order to help people achieve higher levels. It should

contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the national at large.

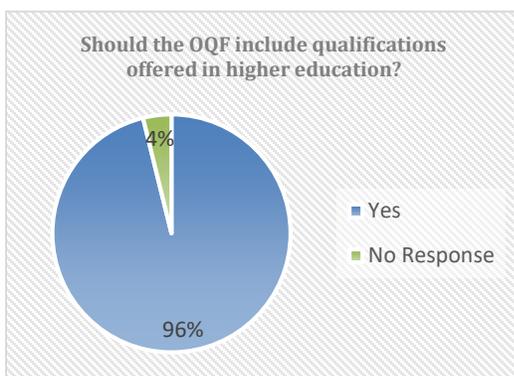
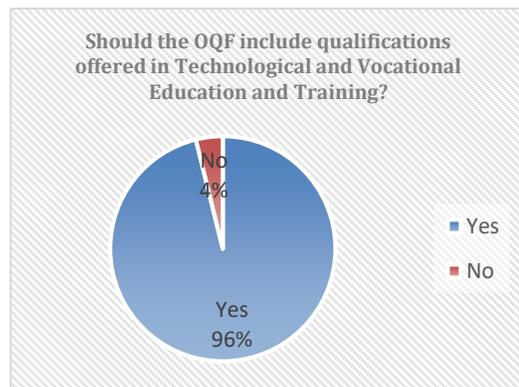
7.1.6 Should the OQF include school qualifications (general education)?



Twenty-two 'yes' responses were received, three 'no' responses and one did not respond. The majority of comments reflected the view that the OQF should contain 'all qualifications for all levels'. However, one 'yes' respondent held the view that they weren't 'sure if it is easy to sensibly categorise for all 12 years of school education'.

7.1.7 Should the OQF include qualifications offered in Technological and Vocational Education and Training?

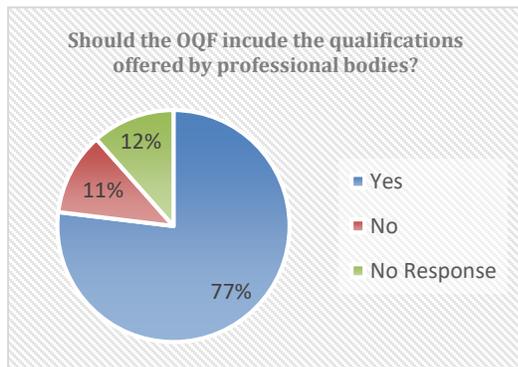
Twenty-five responses were received and one 'no' response. The comments from respondents reflected the importance of the inclusion of TVET. One of the respondents commented that it was 'essential' for employability, another that 'this was a critical issue in Oman' as many of the qualifications are not considered which created problems for those who wish to pursue their study.



7.1.8 Should the OQF include qualifications offered in higher education?

Twenty-five responses were received and with one 'no response'. All were in favour of the inclusion of higher education qualifications. There was the suggestion that medical specialities and a few others should be excluded for the time being.

7.1.9 Should the OQF include the qualifications offered by professional bodies?



Twenty 'yes' responses were received, three 'no' responses and three did not respond. In comparison to the previous questions on other sectors, there was less agreement and a range of views regarding professional bodies. Some comments from those in favour reinforced that the OQF should include all qualifications and that inclusion of profession body qualifications would 'add

value' for the learner as it 'would provide status, recognition enhancing marketability'. One 'yes' response in favour of inclusion suggested that they could be referred to 'but not necessarily include initially'. Another stated that 'this is a must'. A comment from one of the respondents that did not answer either 'yes' or 'no' felt that 'it could be considered but was not necessary'.

7.1.10 Will the ability to be able to describe and compare qualifications from all sectors of education and training be of benefit to Oman?

There was 100% agreement with this statement. Comments from respondents stated that this would be of 'immense benefit to Oman particularly for global competitiveness'. Two comments reflected the benefit this would have on learner mobility and progression within education and that learners would be able to progress and move between and within sectors.

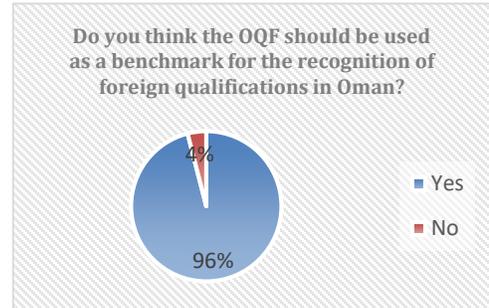
Note: At this point 25 responses were received.

7.1.11 Is it important that Omani qualifications are recognised abroad?

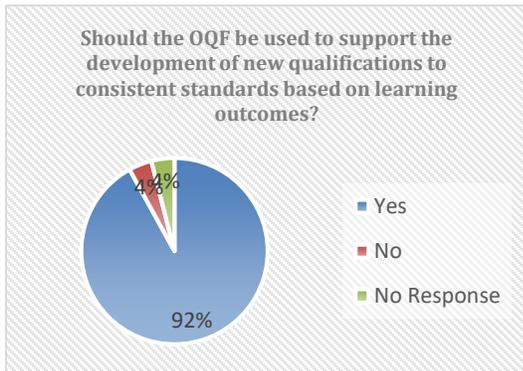
There was 100% agreement with this statement. Comments from respondents included that this would be of 'benefit to students who seek further learning abroad and it would open up employment opportunities worldwide'. There was comment that this would benefit the large number of students who supplement their studies abroad and it was mentioned that this was important in 'both directions'.

7.1.12 Do you think the OQF should be used as a benchmark for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Oman?

Twenty-four 'yes' responses were received and one 'no' response. There was agreement that the OQF should be a benchmark, 'If foreign qualifications are to be used in Oman. Another comment received was that this would be because 'of the large number of foreign labour force working in the Sultanate'.



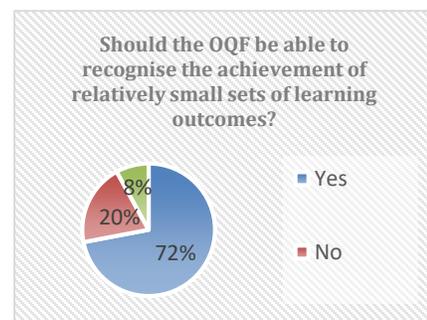
7.1.13 Should the OQF be used to support the development of new qualifications to consistent standards based on learning outcomes?



Twenty-three responses 'yes' were received, one 'no' response and one did not respond. Although there was support for this proposal, a respondent commented that this should be for the future. Others commented that the OQF would be required to harmonise quality standards across all qualifications systems to lead to single comprehensive levels, titles and standards with learning outcomes based on level descriptors. Another commented that this would 'make educational institutions take care of their students' learning outcomes and develop their programs accordingly'.

7.1.14 Should the OQF be able to recognise the achievements of relatively small sets of learning outcomes?

This question received eighteen 'yes' responses and five 'no' responses. This question had the fewest number of 'yes' responses. More than a quarter of respondents did not agree with this proposal. The view of one 'no' respondent was that this would cause confusion. Two 'yes' respondents cautioned that this should be 'at a second stage', 'possibly and eventually if capacity allows but not initially'. There were also



comments stating the benefit of this proposal for the 'promotion of lifelong learning', with some expressing the view that 'a holistic framework should cover even small outcomes' and that 'small sets of learning outcomes can be recognised'.

7.1.15 Should the OQF contribute to the revision of existing qualifications as required?

Twenty-four 'yes' responses and one did not respond to this question. While there was agreement that the OQF should contribute to the revision of qualifications, it was suggested that the medical specialities and a few others should be exempt for the time being. Other comments included the benefit this would be for: better understanding of qualifications and 'harmony among standards'; for consistency; and for the collection of data for analysis to solve identified problems. One comment from a 'yes' responder was that 'this would lead to modular education programs that are accurately and precisely comparable and can be aligned to each educational sector and international qualifications'.

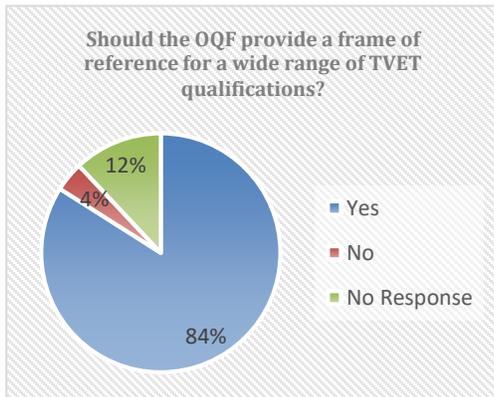


7.1.16. Should the OQF support and strengthen the on-going development of quality assurance processes in education and training?



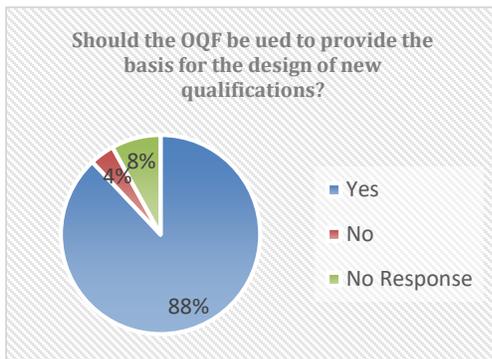
Twenty-four 'yes' responses and one did not respond to this question. There was agreement on this proposal. Responders commented that; 'quality assurance is vital'; 'this would lead to the desired outcomes'; this would strengthen quality assurance in all sectors; and that development of a system designed to address and minimize current variations in quality is very much required. Hence quality assurance processes will be central to credibility and the successful implementation'.

7.1.17 Should the OQF provide a frame of reference for a wide range of TVET qualifications?



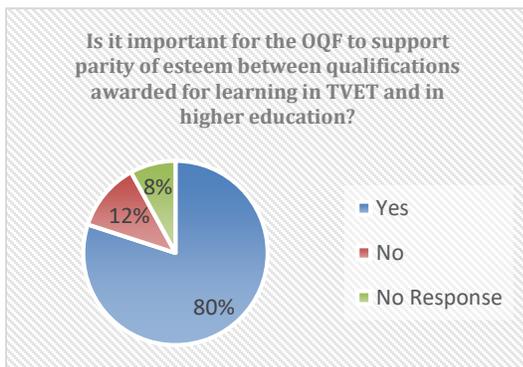
Twenty-one 'yes' responses, one 'no' response and three did not respond. One responder, that did not respond to the question, stated 'not sure'. One comment from a 'yes' respondent pointed out that the 'majority of the students in Oman are enrolled in Technical Education or Vocational Training Institutions and OQF would provide recognition for their qualifications'. Other feedback reinforced the view that the OQF should be comprehensive and 'cover all' sectors of education and training.

7.1.18 Should the OQF be used to provide the basis for the design of new qualifications?



Twenty-two 'yes' responses were received, one 'no' response and two did not respond. Comments included the requirement to have consistent standards based on learning outcomes and that the OQF should have basic standards and parameters for the design of new qualifications. Others commented that the OQF should 'just be a reference point' and 'it should be flexible'.

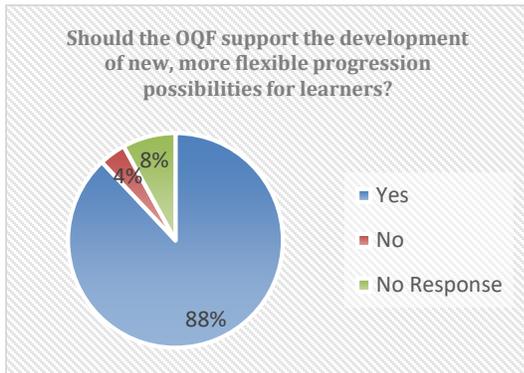
7.1.19 Is it important for the OQF to support parity of esteem between qualifications awarded for learning in TVET and in higher education?



Twenty 'yes' responses were received, three 'no' responses and two did not respond. The parity of esteem between TVET and higher education was viewed as 'blurred' or 'non-existent' so this proposal was viewed as a 'most important step of the OQF'. Other respondents commented that this would: a) be beneficial to employers and learners and help employers get workers with the

right skills; b) give opportunities to a wider range of learners to get qualifications; c) allow progression from technical education or vocational training institutions enabling learners to move between different educational pathways to continue their study.

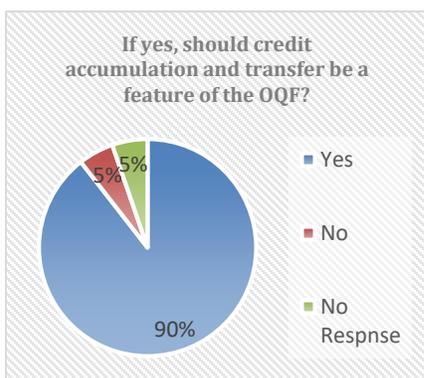
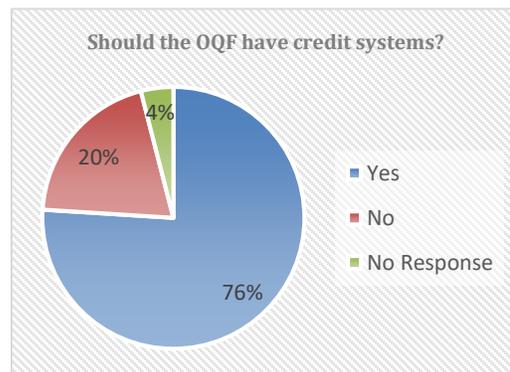
7.1.20 Should the OQF support the development of new more flexible progression possibilities for learners?



Twenty `yes` responses were received, one `no` response and two did not respond. One of those that did not respond commented that they were `not sure`. However, the majority of the respondents supported this proposal. The comments were in support of learners reaching their full potential and helping learners to progress in their chosen field. However, one of the comments pointed out that the OQF has to be reinforced by other reforms.

7.1.21 Should the OQF have credit systems?

Nineteen `yes` responses were received, five `no` responses and one did not respond. Just over 75% gave support to the use of a credit system to: a) enable the learner to study at their own pace; b) lead to a modular educational programs; and c) give flexibility and match OQF programs to international credit systems. Three comments stated that this proposal should be a decision taken at national or sector level. One suggestion was that minimum credit values should be specified to facilitate inter/multi-disciplinary programs.

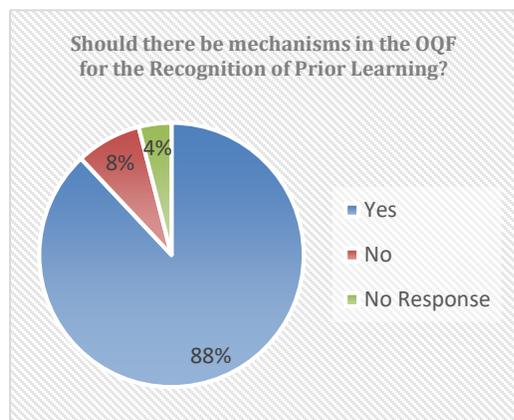


7.1.22 If Yes, should Credit Accumulation and Transfer be a feature of the OQF?

Linked to 7.1.21 there were seventeen responses (from nineteen) that supported the proposal of credit accumulation and transfer. There was one `no` respondent and one did not respond but commented that they were `not sure`. It was stated that CAT helped mobility and progression and could be

applied to HE but not to general education. One respondent suggested that CAT should be able to: a) achieve recognition of smaller steps of learning enabling learners to build up qualifications bit by bit at their own pace; b) help learners achieve qualifications to meet industry needs; and c) recognise work-based training.

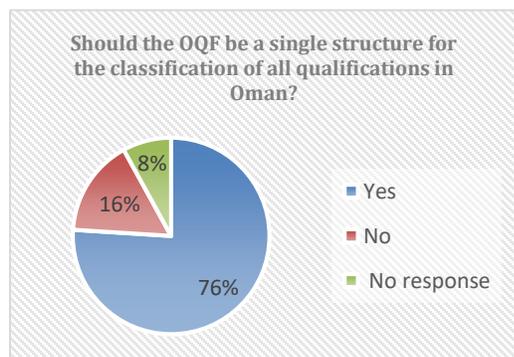
7.1.23 Should there be mechanisms in the OQF for the Recognition of Prior Learning?



Twenty-two `yes` responses were received, two `no` responses and one did not respond. Although a `yes` responder, one commented that this should be at a later time and the other was concerned about the complexity of it. Further comments were around the need for a `customised, systematic and transparent mechanism` and `criteria and guidelines`. A suggestion that the skills test offered by the Occupational Standards Testing Centre (OSTC Ministry of Manpower) could be very useful for the

RPL and that OAAA and OSTC should establish a `logical mechanism` to accomplish this

7.1.24 Should the OQF be a single structure for the classification of all qualifications in Oman?



Nineteen `yes` responses, four `no` and two did not respond. Although not the least, there was less support for the proposal for a single structure than for other proposals. One respondent suggested a `single but at the same time flexible as and when required and/or necessary`. Three respondents stated that a) it should have multi-strands for different categories; b) should be dual. One vocational and

one normal; and c) one for HE, one for vocational and technical and one for school education.

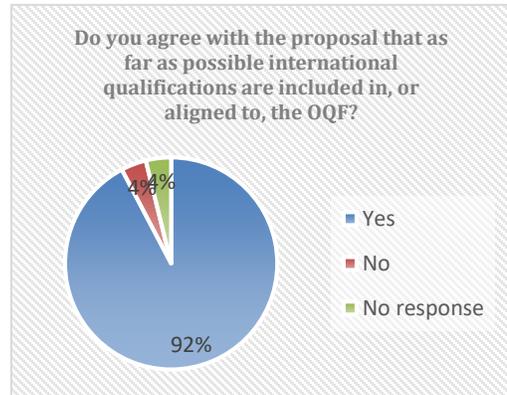
7.1.25 Do you agree that all qualifications on the OQF should be quality assured?

There was 100% agreement with this proposal. Respondents commented that this was a way of `promoting public and professional confidence in the integrity and relevance of national awards` and that `inter-mobility and progression` would be possible if all sectors followed standards and procedures of generic quality assurance processes.

Note: At this point 26 responses were received.

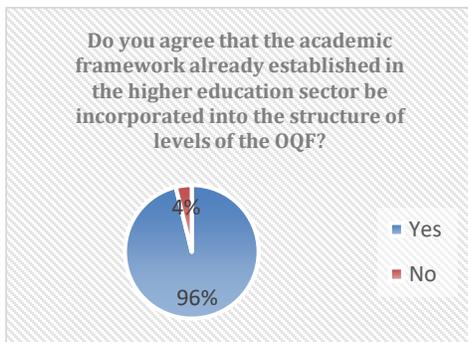
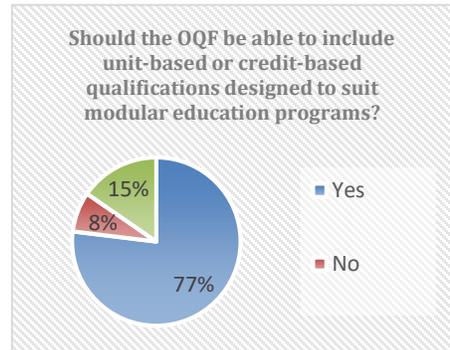
7.1.26 Do you agree with the proposal that as far as possible international qualifications are included in or aligned to the OQF?

Twenty-four `yes` responses were received, one `no` response and one did not respond. There was support for this proposal. One respondent suggested this should take place `at least with the regional qualifications (GCC and Arab) and another that `OQF qualifications and standards would have to be aligned to international qualifications for Omani qualifications to have recognition`. However, one respondent stated that this should only happen `after considering the present Omani structure`. One indicated that this would provide a framework for improved communication and joint action between stakeholders in relation to education and work`.



7.1.27 Should the OQF be able to include unit-based or credit-based qualifications designed to suit modular education programs?

Twenty `yes` responses were received, two `no` and four did not respond. While there was agreement with this proposal, one respondent said that this should be left for the `establishments` to give them flexibility in the syllabus selection. This proposal was considered by others to provide a means to describe and compare qualifications.

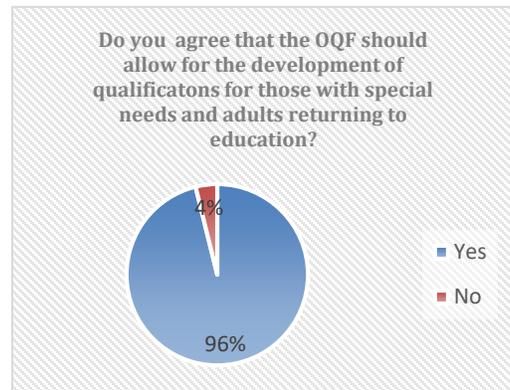


7.1.28 Do you agree that the academic framework already established in the higher education sector be incorporated into the structure of levels of the OQF?

Twenty-five `yes` responses and, one `no` response were received. There was agreement with this proposal. However, three of the respondents commented that the existing academic framework would need to be revised/modified.

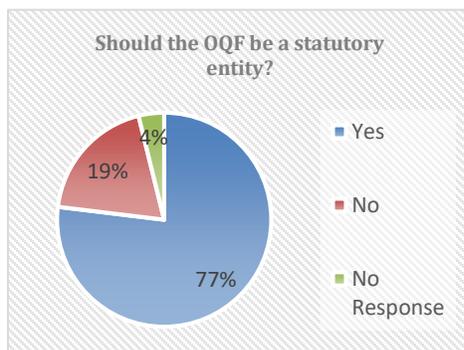
7.1.29 Do you agree that the OQF should allow for the development of qualifications for those with special needs and adults returning to education?

Twenty-five `yes` responses and, one `no` response were received. Respondents were in agreement with this proposal. Some commented that those with special needs had the same right to learn as others. There was also support for those returning to education but one respondent suggested that this might be taken `step-by-step`.



7.1.30 Should level descriptors be developed for the OQF which define the expected outcomes at each level of the framework and which are used by all sectors of education and training?

There was 100% agreement with this proposal. Level descriptors were seen as a way to `help unify standards` which would make the movement from one sector and/or provider to another easier and `would provide a platform for discussion on how to address the variations in the quality of education and training offered by different organisations`. One respondent commented that this was very important but viewed it as being difficult.

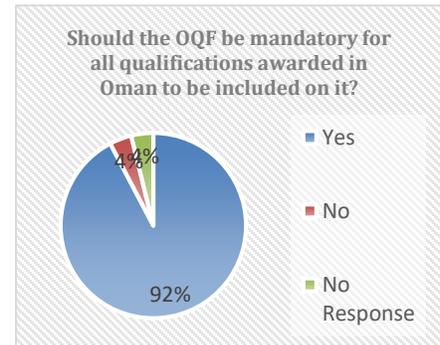


7.1.31 Should the OQF be a statutory entity?

Twenty `yes` responses were received, five `no` response and one did not respond. The majority were in agreement with this proposal. Additional comment from those in agreement indicated that responsibility for the OQF should lie with OAAA.

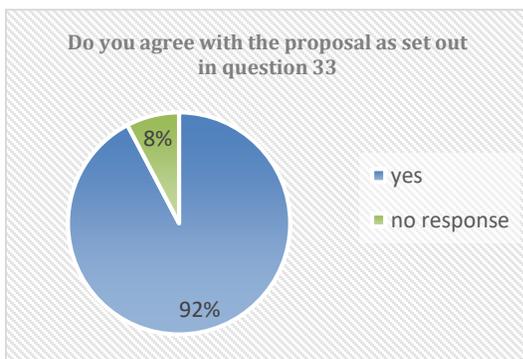
7.1.32 Should the OQF be mandatory for all qualifications awarded in Oman to be included on it?

Twenty-four `yes` responses were received, two `no` response and one did not respond. Respondents agreed with this proposal, with one comment suggesting that if it was not mandatory there would be the possibility of some not using it. Another commented that this was necessary for the OQF to maintain quality standards across the framework and to maintain international standards.



7.1.33 It is proposed that the OQF should:

- **have policies and procedures to define and regulate its installation and implementation in the education and training systems of Oman to address:**
 - additional classification and descriptive instruments that may be employed in the OQF, such as conventions on award titles, use of credit rating, classification by learning sector;
 - the mechanisms for the inclusion of qualifications including professional qualifications in the framework;
 - arrangements for the maintenance of a register of the qualifications in the OQF;
 - policies to promote learner mobility and progression through the systems of qualifications;
- **Arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL).**



Twenty-four `yes` responses were received to this proposal and two `no response`. One respondent `completely endorsed this view as policies, standards, regulations, mechanisms, controls and procedures to regulate and implement it are to be streamlined in a systematic and methodical approach so that national, regional and international qualifications are in par with

each other`. Others commented that it would assist in the `creation of new progression pathways` which would provide opportunities for mobility and progression within education, training and career. However, whilst agreeing in general with the proposal there was some concern expressed particularly with the Recognition of Prior Learning. Others expressed caution and stressed the need for discussion. It was suggested that: a) `this should be done in phases over years`; b) `OQF should be developed sector

by sector. Schools, professional qualifications, higher education, and step by step`; and c) `We are at the first stage of the proposal. Each item demands thorough investigation and formulation and discussion`.

7.1.33 Further Comments

Respondents were given the opportunity to provide further comment on the proposals. Those who responded pointed out the significance and the importance of this project to Oman. One comment was around the communication of the project and advised that as a national project more information was needed in the Sultanate. Others reinforced the need for the OQF to encompass all sectors of education and training. One comment cautioned on the need to `keep it simple` to avoid difficulties in its implementation. The comments are given below:

1. Since it's a national project it's highly recommended that it's well known by Omani people as a whole. More public announcement about the project is needed in all kind of Medias in the Sultanate.
2. The OQF should be complete covering the whole system of education from all sectors. Qualifications well defined using the credit hour system, well recognised by all governmental and private sectors of jobs and employment. Very articulate avoiding confusion in equivalences and transfer along with the job market in Oman and in the Gulf region. The European DF is a very example.
3. As OQF as envisaged is comprehensive, modern, adequate and badly needed. The biggest challenge is to keep it simple. Otherwise, when it comes to implementation we may find difficulties because of complexity.
4. Most of the proposals written above are of paramount significance and importance and match completely to the needs and progression of the educational system in Oman. By incorporation of all these proposals the Oman education system will develop parity among ALL Omani qualifications, transparency, mobility, progression and shall be comparable with other international qualifications.
5. I think it is important of aligning levels with remuneration packages in the workplace since this is such an important part of the Omani employment system.
6. Excellent work. My congratulations.

7.1.34 Sum up

The aim of the Benchmarking Activity Report was to provide a background to international frameworks and identify good practice through the identification of their common features, their scope and objectives in order to develop a proposal for the features of the OQF. Stakeholders, via the Oversight Committee, were consulted on the proposals and whether they agreed with them or not. Thirty-three questions were developed which were based on the proposals set out in section 6 of the Benchmarking Activity Report. These were distributed to the Oversight Committee at its meeting on 13 January 2016. Responses ranged from 100% agreement to 72% agreement on the proposals.

7.1.34.1 There was strong agreement, 100% and 90%, in 18 of the proposals in that the OQF should:

In response to question #	Outcome
1	Be a Framework that can classify all qualifications in the future.
2	Provide an international reference point for Omani qualifications.
3	Support the development of new qualifications in the future.
4	Provide a clear and consistent means of describing and comparing all qualifications in Oman.
7	Include qualifications offered in TVET.
8	Include qualifications offered in higher education.
10	Be able to describe and compare qualifications from all sectors of education and training.
11	Provide the means for the recognition of Omani qualifications abroad.
12	Be the benchmark for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Oman.
13	Be used to support the development of new qualifications to consistent standards based on learning outcomes.
15	Contribute to the revision of existing qualifications as required.
16	Support and strengthen the on-going development of quality assurance processes in education and training.
25	Only include qualifications that are quality assured.
26	Include or align international qualifications to the OQF as far as possible.
28	Incorporate the existing academic framework, already established in the higher education into the structure of the comprehensive OQF.

29	Enable the development of qualifications for those with special needs and adults returning to education.
30	Be based on level descriptors which should be developed, which define the expected outcomes at each level of the framework and which are used by all sectors of education and training.
32	Be mandatory in that all qualifications awarded in Oman should be included on it.

7.1.34.2 There was a lower percentage in agreement, 89% to 80%, with six of the proposals in that the OQF should:

In response to question #	Outcome
6	Include school qualifications (general education).
17	Provide a frame of reference for a wide range of TVET qualifications.
18	Provide the basis for the design of new qualifications.
19	Support parity of esteem between TVET higher education qualifications.
20	Support the development of new, more flexible progression possibilities for learners.
21	Have a mechanism for the recognition of prior learning.

7.1.34.3 There was less agreement, 79% and below, with the seven proposals that the OQF should:

In response to question #	Outcome
5	Enable the development of qualifications at a basic level of education.
9	Include qualifications offered by Professional Bodies.
14	Recognise the achievements of relatively small sets of learning outcomes.
21	Have credit systems.
24	Be a single structure for the classification of qualifications in Oman.
25	Include unit-based or credit-based qualifications, designed to suit modular education programs.
31	Be a statutory entity.

It is clear that there is strong support for: the development of the OQF; the inclusion of the existing academic framework (albeit modified); for the development of level descriptors; the quality assurance mechanisms; the inclusion of TVET and higher education qualifications; and the recognition of international qualifications.

While there is agreement in the seven proposals in 7.1.34.3 the outcome of the consultation should be considered when developing an implementation plan for the eventual roll out of the framework. Consideration should be given to prioritizing the areas with high agreement e.g. the inclusion of TVET and higher education followed later by the inclusion of school qualifications and lastly the qualifications of professional bodies. The cautionary statements from the Oversight Committee that the OQF be developed step-by-step and phased in over a number of years should be borne in mind

It is interesting that the terminology used is for the development of a comprehensive framework. However, 24% disagreed when asked if the OQF should be a single structure. The comments suggest that a 'linked framework' with different strands for the different educational sectors may be more desirable. Consideration should be given to exploring this matter more fully with a wider range of stakeholders to ascertain their views.

8. COMMENTS FROM STAKEHOLDERS

To help direct the comment on the Benchmarking Activity Report, four Guiding Questions were asked of the Oversight Committee and the International Panel, both of which are previously referred to in the Introduction (pg. 6). The four questions were:

1. The purpose of the Benchmarking Activity Report is to provide a review of other international qualifications frameworks, in order to establish commonalities across the frameworks and best practice for qualifications frameworks and to identify what is best for Oman. Does this document fulfil this purpose?
2. Do you think that the recommendations provided in Section 6 of the document are justified by the review of other qualifications frameworks that have been reviewed?
3. Do you think that the recommendations provided in section 6 are appropriate and practical for Oman? Explain and provide details.
4. What other recommendations would you include, based on the review of the various frameworks?

8.1 Feedback from the Oversight Committee on the Questions Posed:

Responses to the Guiding Questions were received from fourteen Oversight Committee members (and their associated network). Three of the fourteen stated that they had no further comment on the Benchmarking Activity Report and that it met its purpose and provided sufficient information. One congratulated `the outstanding work`.

8.1.1 Question 1: Does the Benchmarking Activity Report fulfil the purpose?

Including the three respondents above, all of the respondents considered that the Benchmarking Report fulfilled its purpose, the review of the seven frameworks was justified and that they were in agreement or as one respondent stated `fully agreed with the justification`.

One respondent stated that the report fulfilled its purpose but more information on the Malaysian Framework (MQF) would have been welcomed. Additional information on the MQF (and on the other frameworks) has been added to this final version of the Benchmarking Activity Report. One respondent considered that the `thorough intensive study` of the NQFs was completed along with the policy and strategy documents of Oman, keeping in mind the educational and labour market needs.

8.1.2 Question 2: Are the recommendations justified with regard to the Qualifications

Frameworks reviewed?

From the eleven respondents to this question, all were in agreement that the recommendations were justified and relevant, suitable for Oman and would address `the shortcomings in the Oman education and training system such as: parity of academic and vocational qualifications; mobility; quality assurance; and RPL.

8.1.3 Are the recommendations appropriate and practical for Oman?

All respondents agreed that the recommendations were appropriate and practical for Oman. One commented that the benchmarking of the seven frameworks `gave information on the expectation for an NQF for Oman`. Others commented that the recommendations set out were comprehensive and they filled the gaps in the current educational situation in Oman. One view expressed was that the Benchmarking Activity Report provided a `variety of possibilities and solutions of which, the current educational framework is showing incompetence and had the inability to provide solutions`. Also the recommendations support lifelong learning `which is not feasible in the current structure`. The view of one respondent was that as the OQF would be

`really helpful to HEIs and stakeholders' due to its `structure of levels with level descriptors with an associated table of definitions` as these would provide a frame of reference domestically and internationally and provide the basis for the design of new qualifications'. One respondent commented that the recommendations set out in the report would `create a robust, standard and technically sound framework for present and future designed qualifications. RPL was an area for concern and discussions would need to take place in order to find practical ways for this to be implemented in Oman. Another comment related to the single structure proposed for the OQF in that it wouldn't be `easy to have a single QF as the learning outcomes for vocational education and school and higher education are `fundamentally different`.

8.1.4 Based on the review, what other recommendations would you include?

The majority of respondents had no further suggestions as the recommendations were `sufficient`. A comment was received that there was no mention of Accreditation of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). However, this is considered as an element of RPL and in some circumstances the names, RPL and APEL are used interchangeably. RPL will be a matter for further discussion in the future. Another comment was on including international criteria that focussed on knowledge and skills. Benchmarking international level descriptors to inform the development of the OQF level descriptors will be relevant at the appropriate point in the development process as would the other suggestion for the inclusion of research and development as a compulsory element after post-secondary or university studies. Inclusion of criteria for pre-school was suggested. However, it is not anticipated that the OQF would contain qualifications targeted for pre-school age children. Finally, it was suggested that OAAA should consider changing its name to OAA to reflect that the comprehensive framework would encompass all sectors of education and training not just higher education.

8.1.5 Things to consider: cautionary factors from the Oversight Committee

Possibly challenging areas identified by the Oversight Committee were the proposal of a single structure qualifications framework; how to make lifelong learning a reality; and the inclusion of RPL.

8.2 Feedback from the International Panel on the Questions Posed

8.2.1 Question 1: Does the Benchmarking Activity Report fulfil the purpose?

The view of five of the six International Panel that responded to the first Guiding Question was that the Benchmarking Activity Report was useful in presenting the possible scope, objectives and basic design features for the NQF in Oman. One expert commended the report on being 'comprehensive, well-structured and established a quality basis for the development of a fitting NQF for Oman'. However, one view was that although the Report provided a broad overview of the seven selected frameworks, greater detail would have been welcome with regard to assessment criteria, articulation and IT systems. Assessment criteria is a matter for the awarding bodies. While the criteria for the OQF has yet to be developed, it can be expected that outcomes based assessment will be an element of the criteria for the placement of qualifications on the OQF. Therefore assessment will be of relevance to the implementation stage of the project. Articulation and progression routes for learners are a stated objective in some frameworks, but not all (section 4.1). This is one of the features of the OQF that stakeholders were consulted on to ascertain if progression was a feature that was desirable in Oman and 88% of respondents said that it was. This is encouraging of course but to avoid delays in the development of a framework through being stymied in the detail, it is advised that discussions on the means of progression should be discussed and agreed among stakeholders near the end of the development of the framework or indeed after it is developed. For example, would stakeholders accept the concept of automatic progression from one level to another? If not, on what basis would progression be acceptable? When agreement is reached appropriate policies, procedures and guidelines can be developed. Therefore, depending on willingness, gaining agreement on 'progression opportunities for learners' could be a long-term objective of the OQF. Terms of Reference for the OQF IT system is a distinct element of the OQF project and will be carried out when the governance arrangements for the NQF are known.

8.2.2 Question 2: Are the recommendations justified with regard to the Qualifications Frameworks reviewed?

From the five responses to this questions, respondents were in general agreement that the recommendations set out in Section 6 of the report were justified and were in line with other national qualifications frameworks and having such a framework as outlined in the report has 'potential merits'. However, decisions will be required on prioritizing the objectives and matching

these to available resources. It was suggested that an action plan/implementation plan be devised to enable `the roll-out of recommendations`. The outcome of consultation with stakeholders on the key features, scope and objectives of the OQF will be extremely useful for the development of the planned implementation plan as the areas of major importance to stakeholders can be easily identified.

One respondent emphasised the need for the OQF to link educational outcomes with the labour market and felt that this was missing in the recommendations. However, the International Panel member did point out that throughout the Report reference was made to link between the NQF and the labour market. One of the aims of the consultation on the recommendations was to ascertain the views of stakeholders on the proposed of the features, scope and objectives that the OQF should have. To this end a questionnaire, based on the proposals, was devised to ascertain the view of stakeholders on whether the OQF should include Technological and Vocational Education and Training (Q7), higher education (Q8) and school qualifications (Q6). The outcome of the consultation provided a surety, with 96% in favour, that one of the priorities for the OQF will be the inclusion of qualifications from technical institutions and vocational providers as well as those from the higher education institutions. The outcome of the consultation will contribute to the development of a Conceptual Design Framework where the recommendations in Section 6 will be fleshed out with more detail on the technicalities of the framework which will be taken forward within the Technical Framework Design. In addition, a plan will be developed for the installation and implementation of the framework.

8.2.3 Are the recommendations appropriate and practical for Oman?

The International Panel recognised the key features as set out in Section 6 were consistent with most national qualifications frameworks throughout the world. Two of the four respondents to this question viewed the recommendations as being appropriate and practical for Oman. One commented that it was not clear how the OQF would accommodate the smaller sized qualifications/awards/skills set often associated with vocational education and training. This was one of the proposed features of the OQF that stakeholders were consulted on. While there was agreement that this should be included, it can be seen from the response of stakeholders that this was received less favourably than the other proposals and stakeholders suggested that this should be a long term objective but not something that should be tackled initially.

8.2.4 Based on the review, what other recommendations would you include?

The International Panel provided suggestions for additional recommendations and these will prove to be interesting considerations for the implementation phase of the project. The suggestions were: the development of clear graduate profiles for each qualification on the OQF; development of clear education and employment pathways; inclusion of performance or assessment outcomes; type of articulation that might be most suitable for Oman; type of credit accumulation and transfer system would be most suitable; IT system to support the OQF.

8.2.5 Things to consider: cautionary factors from the International Panel

The International Panel members highlighted some challenges for the OQF:

1. The inclusion of school qualifications which has proven to be difficult elsewhere. It was recommended that if stakeholders, want school qualifications to be included it was advised that the relevant authorities make an early start.
2. The challenge of producing a unified framework that was easily understood by all stakeholders which, can be applied in the context of higher education (academic) and in vocational and technical fields.
3. Having `absolute consistency` in award titles was also seen as posing some difficulties. The advice from the International Panel member was to allow some variation in titles as long as the `basic interpretation of level is not compromised`. It was cautioned that too much change can result in employers (and others) rejecting the framework.
4. It was highlighted that `hard decisions` were required on prioritising the objectives of the OQF and matching the objectives to the available resources.
5. The importance of capacity building was highlighted.

8.3 Canadian Qualifications Framework

During the discussions and consultation on the Benchmarking Activity Report, a request was made for information on the Canadian experience of qualifications frameworks.

8.3.1 Background information

Canada comprises thirteen Provinces and Territories which are: Alberta; British Columbia; Manitoba; New Brunswick; Newfoundland and Labrador; Nova Scotia; Northwest Territories; Nunavut; Ontario; Prince Edward Island; Quebec; Saskatchewan; and Yukon. The responsibility

for post-secondary education lies with the provincial and territorial governments and each have laws, policies and procedures that govern how educational institutions operate.

8.3.2 Qualifications Frameworks

The provincial and territorial ministers responsible for post-secondary education adopted a pan-Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework (2007) which is part of the *Ministerial Statement on Quality Assurance of Degree Education in Canada*. The purpose of the Ministerial Statement is to:

- To provide assurance to the public, students, employers, and postsecondary institutions at home and abroad that new programs and new institutions of higher learning meet appropriate standards and that performance against the standards will be assessed by appropriate means;
- To provide a context for identifying how degree credentials compare in level and standard to those in other jurisdictions, with a view to facilitating the search for continuous improvement, the education and training of an internationally competitive workforce, and international recognition of the quality of Canadian credentials;
- To improve student access to further study at the postsecondary level by establishing a degree-level standards context in which policies on the transfer of credits and credential recognition may be developed and, in fairness to students who choose non-traditional providers, to focus discussion of credit transfer and credential recognition on the academic standards that the programs involved have met.

Within the Ministerial Statement Document, which has no legal status, there are Guidelines for decision making purposes relating to new Degree programs, Bachelor's Degrees, Master's Degrees and Doctoral Degrees are presented. The Statement also provides Guidelines for new degree-granting institutions within a province/territory. The Guidelines contain three sections:

1. Canadian Degree Qualifications Framework.
2. Procedures and Standards for New Degree Program Quality Assessment.
3. Procedures and Standards for Assessing New Degree-Granting Institutions.

The Ministerial Statement be found at the following location:

<http://cicic.ca/1286/Pan-Canadian-qualifications-frameworks/index.canada>

8.3.3 Provincial and Territorial Qualifications Frameworks

Four of the ten provinces, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Ontario and Prince Edward Island use a Qualifications Framework. None of the three territories have adopted a framework.

8.3.3.1 Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia

These three provinces have adopted the Maritime Degree Level Qualifications Framework⁷⁸.

This framework only relates to higher education and the descriptions within the `strands` are intended to `capture the most general aspects of each degree level`. The degree levels are:

- Baccalaureate Degree General;
- Baccalaureate Degree Major/Double Major/Advanced Major;
- Baccalaureate Degree Honours Specialization;
- Baccalaureate Degree Professional Area of Study;
- Baccalaureate Degree Applied Area of Study.

The `strands` of the framework are:

- Overall Program Design and Outcome Evidence;
- Preparation for Employment and Future Study;
- Length of Program;
- Depth and Breadth of Knowledge in the Field;
- Depth and Breadth of Knowledge outside the Field;
- Conceptual and Methodological Awareness;
- Level of Analytical Skill;
- Level of Application of Knowledge;
- Professional Capacity/Autonomy;
- Level of Communication Skills;
- Awareness of Limits of Knowledge.

⁷⁸ <http://cicic.ca/1287/Provincial-and-territorial-qualifications-frameworks/index.canada>

8.3.3.2 Ontario

The Ontario Qualifications Framework includes all non-religious postsecondary certificate, diploma and degree programs offered under the auspices of the Province of Ontario, including apprenticeship certificates, the qualifications awarded by private career colleges, the qualifications awarded by public colleges, and degrees offered by public universities and institutions authorized to award degrees by a consent of the Minister of Training, Colleges and Universities of Ontario⁷⁹.

8.4 Singapore

During discussions, the OAAA Board requested information on Singapore. However, there is no national qualifications framework in Singapore per se. Singapore developed the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) which was established in 2003 with the aim of reducing the effects of the economic crisis in 2000.

The WDA contributes to training and upskilling the workforce and has a mission to lead and champion workforce development to increase competitiveness and the employability of the workforce. The main objectives of the WDA are to:

- Keep training relevant;
- Strengthen Continuing Education and Training (CET) infrastructure;
- Help workers find jobs.

The work to develop Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSQ) Frameworks began in areas such as cleaning, wafer fabrication and textiles. In 2016, the WDA has 34 WSQ frameworks. These are all recognised by industry and an Industry Skills and Training Councils have been established for each framework to help drive the development and validation of skills standards, assessment strategies and training curricula. Industry Skills Training Councils comprise of key industry partners which include employers, industry associations, training organisations and unions. Their role is to develop:

⁷⁹ <http://www.tcu.gov.on.ca/pepg/programs/oqf/>

- An industry competency map which captures the type of skills needed in the industry. The skills are classified as:
 - Employability Skills;
 - Occupational Skills and Knowledge;
 - Industry Skills and Knowledge.
- Qualifications to reflect the acquired skills and lay the foundation for career-based training, upgrading pathways and skills recognition. The skills standards and training modules are organised into seven levels of nationally recognised qualifications, ranging from Certificate to Graduate Diploma.
- Competency Standards and Curriculum: the competency standards list the skills, knowledge and attitudes needed to perform a job task and describe the acceptable levels of performance. The resulting curriculum guides the design of the training programs and assessment plans.

WSQ frameworks develop skills in two different aspects: foundational and industry-specific:

- Foundational Skills

Comprise a range of skills, knowledge and attributes that help every individual improve his or her employability. These skills enable workers to better adapt to new job demands and a changing workforce environment. Foundational skills are portable across all industries.

- Industry and Occupational Skills

WSQ industry frameworks cover skills that equip individuals with the know-how to perform specific jobs well.

Since its establishment WDA has expanded the CET infrastructure and now includes:

- A network of five career centres;
- More than 40 CET Centres offering training and career services;
- A National Singapore Workforce Skills Qualifications Framework (WSQ) covering 34 industries;
- The Institute for Adult Learning to enhance the capabilities and professionalism of adult educators so as to broaden and deepen their expertise.

Subsequently OAAA Staff have asked the question should the Singaporean model be `considered for benchmarking purposes in Phase 2 of the project`? The Singaporean model is certainly interesting but is more akin to, but not the same as Sector Skills Councils in the UK, and would not be considered a priority for benchmarking in the future.

9. CONCLUSION

The Benchmarking Activity Report provided: the context of Oman; background information on different types of NQFs; a review of framework in nine countries (including Canada and Singapore); and information on stakeholders' expectations of the OQF. Synthesis of information led to the identification of key features and a set of recommendations for the OQF which stakeholders were asked to consider.

At a meeting of the OQF Oversight Committee in January 2016, SQA Technical Experts presented on the Benchmarking Activity Report and distributed a questionnaire to members to ascertain the views of Oversight Committee Members, their colleagues and their associated networks. The twenty-six responses were analysed which revealed the features of the OQF that stakeholders viewed as most important.

Aided by four Guiding Questions, the views of the Oversight Committee and the International Panel were sought on the content of the Benchmarking Activity Report. A summary of their responses is provided along with their advice on areas that in their view require some caution. In response to a request from a stakeholder, a summary of the situations in Canada and Singapore is also provided.

The outcome of the consultation which is detailed in Section 7 of the Benchmarking Activity Report will be helpful in taking forward the development of the OQF and enable the Conceptual Design Framework, Technical Framework, Implementation Plan and Governance Structure of the OQF to proceed.

APPENDIX 1

Organisations Represented on the OQF Oversight Committee

- Secretariat General Education Council
- Diwan of Royal Court
- Ministry of Education
- Ministry of Higher Education
- Ministry of Manpower
- Secretariat General Supreme Planning Council
- Ministry of Defence
- Ministry of Health
- Ministry of Civil Service
- Oman Medical Speciality Board
- Sultan Qaboos University
- Private Higher Education Institutions (HEIs)
- Employers and Professional Bodies
- The Research Council.

APPENDIX 2

International Panel

- Tariq Al Sindi Kingdom of Bahrain
- Peter Cheung Hong Kong
- Tony Palladino United Arab Emirates
- Dr Paulette Powell South Africa
- Dr Patsy Paxton New Zealand
- William O'Keefe Ireland
- Professor Ian P. Cumbus United Arab Emirates
- Professor Rujhan Bin Mustafa Malaysia

APPENDIX 3

Summary of key features of seven NQFs Reviewed

The following table summarises the key features of the seven national qualifications frameworks which were reviewed. All seven of these NQFs make reference to credit systems but the extent to which credit is fully embedded in each framework varies. The SCQF and the NQF in Bahrain has credit fully embedded in the framework and systematically defines the credit rating/mapping of each qualification.

All of the NQFs are designed to accommodate qualifications achieved wholly or partly through processes for the recognition of prior learning, but there are wide variations in the extent to which such processes are enabled in the systems for the award of qualifications in the seven countries.

Description	AQF	QF EMIRATES	NQFB	MQF	NZQF	SCQF	Irish NFQ
Rationale / purpose	Facilitate pathways to and between formal qualifications. It is considered the basis for providing standards and establishing quality for Australian qualifications.	The framework aims at valuing every individual's learning and enhancing access, transfer, progression and recognition of qualifications, leading to a skilled and knowledgeable workforce for a globally competitive environment.	Establish a qualifications system that is transparent, recognisable and credible that will be accepted by stakeholders both on a national and international level.	Framework (MQF) is an instrument that develops and classifies qualifications based on a set of criteria that is agreed nationally and benchmarked with international practices, and which classifies the academic levels, learning outcomes and credits system based on student academic load.	The NZQF is a framework based on outcomes, described in terms of knowledge, skills and attributes, and their application. The NZQF is designed to optimize the recognition of educational achievement and its contribution to New Zealand's economic, social and cultural success.	<p>Help people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential.</p> <p>Enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other, and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.</p>	<p>It ensures awards obtained in Ireland are quality-assured and recognised internationally.</p> <p>It is part of a system for comparing Irish and international awards.</p> <p>It supports lifelong learning by recognising knowledge and skills within a comparative framework even if they are not recognised by a formal award.</p> <p>It provides a system of establishing eligibility for access, transfer and progression to learning opportunities.</p>

Description	AQF	QF EMIRATES	NQFB	MQF	NZQF	SCQF	Irish NFQ
Type of NQF	Relational Reforming	Relational Reforming	Relational Reforming	Reforming	Relational Reforming	Relational Reforming	
International Benchmark	International	International	International		International	International	Transforming
Scope	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education	Higher education and training
	Vocational education and training	Vocational education and training	Vocational education, and training	Skills, Vocational and technical education		Vocational Education and Training	Further education and training
	Schools (general education)	Schools (general education)	Schools (general education)		Schools (general education)	Schools (general education)	Schools (general education)
		Lifelong learning		Lifelong learning	Lifelong learning,	Lifelong Learning	RPL
Learning progression	CAT& RPL	CAT& RPL	CAT & RPL	CAT & RPL	CAT & RPL	CAT & RPL	CAT & RPL
Levels	10 levels	10 levels	10 levels	8 levels	10 levels	12 levels	10 levels

Description	AQF	QF EMIRATES	NQFB	MQF	NZQF	SCQF	Irish NFQ
Types of qualifications	Doctoral Degree Master's Degree Honours Degree Bachelor's Degree Associated Degree Advanced Diploma Diploma Certificate	Doctoral Degree Applied Masters Masters Applied Graduate Diploma Postgraduate Diploma Bachelor's Degree Applied Bachelor's Degree Bachelor's Degree Advanced Diploma Higher Diploma Associate Degree Diploma Secondary School Certificate Certificates 1-4	Doctoral Degree Master's Degree Postgraduate Diploma Bachelor's Degree Higher Diploma Diploma Advanced School Graduation Certificate Higher Certificate School graduation Certificate Intermediate Certificate Access Levels 1&2	Doctoral Research Masters Fully or Partly Taught Masters Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate Bachelor's Degree Graduate Diploma Graduate Certificate Advanced Diploma Diploma Certificate Skills Certificate	Doctoral Degree Master's Degree Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates Bachelor Honours Degree Bachelor Degree Graduate Diplomas and Certificates Diploma Certificate	35 titles, ranging from Doctoral Degree at level 12 and National 1 at Level 1. In addition the SCQF Database contains qualifications and learning programs from a wide variety of educational providers including Awarding Bodies, Employers, Voluntary Organisations and Community Learning.	Higher Doctorate Doctoral Degree Postgraduate Diploma Master's Degree Higher Diploma Honours Bachelor's Degree Ordinary Bachelor's Degree Higher Certificate Advanced Certificate Leaving Certificate Junior Certificate Level 1-5 Certificates

Description	AQF	QF EMIRATES	NQFB	MQF	NZQF	SCQF	Irish NFQ
Level Descriptors	Knowledge Skills Application of knowledge and skills	Knowledge Skills Competence (autonomy and responsibility, role in context and self-development)	Knowledge Skills Competence	Knowledge Practice skills Social skills and responsibilities Values, attitudes and professionalism Communication, leadership and team skills Problem solving and scientific skills Information management and lifelong learning skills Managerial and entrepreneurial skills	Knowledge Skills Application	Knowledge & Understanding Practice Generic Cognitive Skills Communication, ICT and Numeracy Autonomy, accountability, and working with others	Knowledge (breadth and kind) Know-how (range and selectivity) Competence (context, role, learning to learn and insight)

Description	AQF	QF EMIRATES	NQFB	MQF	NZQF	SCQF	Irish NFQ
Governing Body	Dept. of Education and Training. The AQF Council comprises 12 members from HE, TVET, Employers, Unions, and Regional Governments. The Council has an independent chair ⁸⁰	National Qualifications Authority. This was formed under Federal Decree No1 which states 'Establish and maintain a National Qualifications Authority' ⁸¹	Managed by the National Authority for Qualifications and Quality Assurance in Education and Training (QQA). The QQA has established the General Directorate of National Qualifications Frameworks ⁸²	Ministry of Higher Education; Malaysian Qualifications Authority ⁸³	Ministry of Education; New Zealand Qualifications Authority ⁸⁴	The SCQF in Scotland is managed by the SCQF Partnership (SCQFP) which is a Company Limited by Guarantee ⁸⁵ The SCQFP is a registered charity in Scotland. The Board of Directors, which has an independent chair, comprises representatives from HE, SQA, the College Sector and employers ⁸⁶	Managed by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI). The QQI is managed by a Board comprising ten members from education and training. The Board is appointed by the Minister for Education and Skills ⁸⁷ .

⁸⁰ www.aqf.edu.au

⁸¹ www.nqa.gov.ae/en/documents

⁸² www.qqa.edu.bh/en/qaetunits/nqfu

⁸³ www.mqa.gov.my/mgr

⁸⁴ www.nqqa.govt.nz

⁸⁵ A company limited by guarantee does not raise money from stakeholders but that has member who promise to give a particular amount of money to pay the company's debts if it fails (see Cambridge Dictionaries On-line at <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/company-limited-by-guarantee>)

⁸⁶ <http://scqf.org.uk/about-us/scqf-partnership-board/>

⁸⁷ www.qqi.ie/pages/qqi-board

APPENDIX 4

Key Features of the OQF

OQF Oversight Committee

Response to Recommendations in Benchmarking Activity Report⁸⁸

Your Name

Your Organisation (please include)

Please highlight your choice in response to the following questions. Additional space is given under each question for any comments you may have.

	Questions	Yes	No
1.	Should the OQF be a framework that can classify all qualifications in Oman?	Yes	No
Further comment			
2.	Should the OQF provide an international reference point for Omani qualifications?	Yes	No
Further comment			
3	Should the OQF support the development of new qualifications in the future?	Yes	No
Further comment			

⁸⁸ Extracted from Benchmarking Report

	Questions	Yes	No
4.	Should the OQF provide a clear and consistent means of describing and comparing all qualifications in Oman?	Yes	No
Further comment			
5.	Should the OQF enable the develop qualifications at a basic level of education?	Yes	No
Further comment			
6.	Should the OQF include school qualifications (general education)?	Yes	No
Further comment			
7.	Should the OQF include qualifications offered in Technological and Vocational Education and Training?	Yes	No
Further comment			
8.	Should the OQF include qualifications offered in higher education?	Yes	No
Further comment			
9.	Should the OQF include the qualifications offered by professional bodies?	Yes	No
Further comment			
10.	Will the ability to be able to describe and compare qualifications from all sectors of education and training be of benefit to Oman?	Yes	No
Further comment			

	Questions	Yes	No
11.	Is it important that Omani qualifications are recognised abroad?	Yes	No
Further comment			
12	Do you think the OQF should be used as a benchmark for the recognition of foreign qualifications in Oman?	Yes	No
Further comment			
13.	Should the OQF be used to support the development of new qualifications to consistent standards based on learning outcomes?	Yes	No
Further comment			
14.	Should the OQF be able to recognise the achievement of relatively small sets of learning outcomes?	Yes	No
Further comment			
15.	Should the OQF contribute to the revision of existing qualifications as required?	Yes	No
Further comment			
16.	Should the OQF support and strengthen the on-going development of quality assurance processes in education and training?	Yes	No
Further comment			
17.	Should the OQF provide a frame of reference for a wide range of TVET qualifications?	Yes	No
Further			

	Questions	Yes	No
comment			
18.	Should the OQF be used to provide basis for the design of new qualifications?	Yes	No
Further comment			
19	Is it important for the OQF to support the parity of esteem between qualifications awarded for learning in TVET and in higher education	Yes	No
Further comment			
20.	Should the OQF support the development of new, more flexible progression possibilities for learners?	Yes	No
Further comment			
21.	Should the OQF have credit systems?	Yes	No
Further comment			
22.	If yes, should Credit Accumulation and Transfer be a feature of the OQF?	Yes	No
Further comment			
23.	Should there be mechanisms in the OQF for the Recognition of Prior Learning (formal, non-formal and informal learning)?	Yes	No
Further comment			
24.	Should the OQF be a single structure for the classification of all	Yes	No

	Questions	Yes	No
	qualifications in Oman?		
Further comment			
25.	Do you agree that all qualifications placed on the OQF should be quality-assured? (school education, TVET and higher education and professional qualifications).	Yes	No
Further comment			
26.	Do you agree with the proposal that as far as possible international qualifications are included in, or aligned with, the OQF?	Yes	No
Further comment			
27.	Should the OQF be able to include unit-based or credit-based qualifications designed to suit modular education programs?	Yes	No
Further comment			
28.	Do you agree that the academic qualifications framework already established in the higher education sector be incorporated into the overall structure of levels of the OQF?	Yes	No
Further comment			
29.	Do you agree that the OQF should allow for the development of qualifications for those with special needs and adults returning to basic education?	Yes	No

	Questions	Yes	No
Further comment			
30.	Should level descriptors be developed for the OQF which define the expected outcomes at each level of the framework and which are used by all sectors of education and training?	Yes	No
Further comment			
31.	Should the OQF be a statutory entity?	Yes	No
Further comment			
32.	Should the OQF be mandatory for all qualifications awarded in Oman to be included in it or aligned to it?	Yes	No
Further comment			
	<p>It is proposed that OQF should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have policies and procedures to define and regulate its installation and implementation in the education and training systems of Oman to address: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ additional classification and descriptive instruments that may be employed in the OQF, such as conventions on award titles, use of credit rating, classification by learning sector; ○ the mechanisms for the inclusion of qualifications including professional qualifications in the framework; ○ arrangements for the maintenance of a register of the qualifications in the OQF; ○ policies to promote learner mobility and progression through the systems of qualifications; 		

	Questions	Yes	No
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ arrangements for the recognition of prior learning (RPL). 		
33.	Do you agree with the proposal set out above?	Yes	No
Further comment			
34.	If you wish, please do not hesitate to provide further comment here on the proposals for the OQF as set out in the Benchmarking Activity Report.		
Further comment			

Many thanks for your participation which is most appreciated.

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