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**Oman Qualifications Framework Development Project**  
**Communications Strategy**  
**2015-2017**

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FINAL DRAFT

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## Table of Acronyms

AQF	Australian Qualifications Authority
FAQs	Frequently Asked Questions
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OAAA	Oman Academic Accreditation Authority
OQF	Oman Qualifications Authority
SCQF	Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SMS	Short Message Service
TVET	Technological and Vocational Education
UAE	United Arab Emirates
URL	Uniform Resource Locator

# 1. Introduction

The development of a comprehensive National Qualifications Framework in Oman is extremely important for the country. It will be one of the contributors in the further development of the education systems and quality assurance mechanisms in all sectors: higher education; technological and vocational education (TVET); and schools.

Communication about the framework —the reasons for its development, progress and processes— will be vitally important if `buy-in` from a wide range of stakeholders is to be achieved. As the framework develops they will want to know the benefits for them and what affect the framework requirements are going to have on their existing processes e.g. the amount of work that is involved and the costs.

When developed it will be important to let employers, guidance providers and the general public know the benefits to them and how these can be utilised.

This Communication Strategy provides a reference and a guide for the strategic decisions that will need to be made regarding communication with a wide range of stakeholders. It is relevant to the two planned phases of the project so covers the period from 2015 to 2017 and will form the basis for the development of Communication Plans throughout this period. It highlights the decisions that will need to be taken in order that systematic Communication Plans can be developed to ensure that all stakeholders are communicated with effectively.

## 1.1 The Context of Oman

As at January 2015, Oman's population was just over 3.5 million people and it is expected that this number will increase in 2016<sup>1</sup>. Those who are dependent on others, e.g. over 65 and under 15, comprise 52.2% of the population. Less than half of the working population must support the goods and services required for the elderly and the young. Therefore, it is in the interest of all that personal wealth is generated. Education and training are regarded as essential in `creating a more diversified economy, with a focus on long term sustainability'<sup>2</sup>. On many occasions, His Majesty Sultan Qaboos bin Al Said has stressed how important learning and training is for the wealth of the nation.

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<sup>1</sup> *Countrymeters*, info/en/Oman

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*

Most recently, in November 2015, His Majesty addressed the 38<sup>th</sup> 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.’<sup>3</sup>

Higher education in Oman is delivered by both public and private institutions. There are a variety of public higher education providers<sup>4</sup>: 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; fourteen Health Institutes. There is also the Military Technical College; the Armed Forces Medical School; the Institute of Topographical Science; the National Defence College; Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy; the Airforce Technical College; the Institute of Sharia Sciences; and the College of Banking and Financial Studies. A list of the institutions is attached as *Appendix 1*<sup>5</sup>.

Over recent years there has been rapid growth in enrolments at these public institutions. For example, in 2004 to 2005 collectively there were just over 10,200 enrolments in the public institutions mentioned above<sup>6</sup>. By 2008, enrolments at Sultan Qaboos University alone reached 15,000.

Over the past twenty years private universities and colleges have also seen significant growth in the number of student enrolments: 400 enrolments in 1996; 5,223 enrolments<sup>7</sup> in 2004-5; 34,000 in 2008<sup>8</sup>.

Technological and Vocational Training (TVET) also continues to grow. In 2011-12 there were around 40,000 students and it is expected that student numbers will increase by 20% each year for the next 4 years<sup>9</sup>.

However, Oman faces several challenges which the national development plans, Vision 2020 and Vision 2040 aim to address: the need for educational attainment to meet labour market needs; to reduce the skills gaps; and reduce the mismatch between the skills of the workforce and the skills required to meet employers’ needs.

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<sup>3</sup> Oman Observer, 9 November 2015

<sup>4</sup> Al-Lamki et al, (2006), *The Development of Private Higher Education in the Sultanate of Oman: Perception and Analysis*, International Journal of Private Education

<sup>5</sup> Number of public institutions to be verified

<sup>6</sup> Ibid pg 54.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> OAAA Presentation: *The Oman Context*

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.tvetoman.net/Pages.php?PID=26>

In addition it is recognised that there is a need to: improve quality within all sectors of education and training; increase options and pathways for progression for learners; achieve a balance between academic and vocational education by increasing recognition of the value of TVET and provide recognition of achievement for all including those with Special Needs<sup>10</sup>.

It is within this context that the Education Council directed the Oman Academic Accreditation Authority (OAAA) (decision March 2014) to develop and maintain a comprehensive National Qualifications Framework (NQF). OAAA is a government entity which is responsible for regulating<sup>11</sup> public and private higher education.

## **1.2 Towards a Comprehensive National Qualifications Framework**

Although a qualifications framework is already in place in Oman, it is for post-secondary academic qualifications delivered in higher education. The existing Oman Qualifications Framework (OQF) comes under the remit of the OAAA which has been directed by Royal Decree (54/2010) to regulate higher education in Oman, ensuring appropriate levels to meet international standards. The OQF is used to:

‘provide consistency in academic program requirements and award titles, as well as to provide equivalence of standards in comparison with respected international institutions of Higher Education’<sup>12</sup>

To carry out its remit to develop and establish a comprehensive OQF, OAAA included within its organisational structure, *The National Qualifications Framework Department*, headed by a Director of National Qualifications Framework to take the development forward. The Department is augmented by a dedicated Development Team which is comprised of senior representatives seconded 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 the OQF.

In addition, eight external experts have been identified to provide the perspective of the ‘critical friend’. These external experts are from: Kingdom of Bahrain; Ireland; United Arab Emirates; Abu Dhabi; Auckland; Hong Kong; Malaysia.

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<sup>10</sup> Sultanate of Oman Ministry of Education and The World Bank (2012), *Education in Oman: Drive for Quality*

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.oaaa.gov.om/About.aspx#Establishment>

<sup>12</sup> ROSQA B, part 1, pg 28 Cited by OAAA, in the *Project Proposal for the Development of a Comprehensive Qualifications Framework for Oman and Planning for the Implementation and Maintenance of the Framework* (2014)

There will be two phases to the OQF Project; both phases will be completed by mid-2017. Phase 1 was launched on 20 May 2015 at an event which was well attended by Ministries, a wide range of stakeholders and international guests. In order to be successful in building on the interest in the OQF that has already been generated it is necessary to ensure that all stakeholders are kept informed of developments as the project progresses throughout the two phases.

### 1.3 Purpose of the Communications Strategy

While `communication` is defined as `imparting or exchanging of information by speaking, writing or using some other medium'<sup>13</sup> perhaps more relevant to the OQF is the definition for corporate communication:

`the integrated approach to all communication produced by an organisation, directed at relevant target groups'<sup>14</sup>:

World renowned management guru, Drucker (1973) defines `strategy` as:

`Analytical thinking and commitment of resources to action'<sup>15</sup>.

The purpose of this Communications Strategy is to provide a **focus** for the **decisions** that are **required** for the development of appropriate, targeted communication about the OQF to Ministries, stakeholders and the general public.

The Communications Strategy aligns to the OAAA Strategic Plan for the period 2016 to 2020 with regard to the development and implementation of the OQF.

The Communication Strategy covers the period from the beginning of Phase 1 to the end of Phase 2. It will form the basis for the development of detailed Communication Plan(s) throughout the two phases of the project. The Communication Plan(s) will set out a schedule of detailed activities which will change and adapt as the development of the OQF progresses.

### 1.4 Communication Objective

Effective communication with stakeholders will be essential to gaining the co-operation and agreement of stakeholders (buy-in) for this national project. The overarching objective of this strategy is to provide direction to reach the ultimate goal of influencing and informing on the development of the OQF.

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<sup>13</sup> Google on-line dictionary

<sup>14</sup> Reil V. cited by Steyn, (2000), *Model for developing a corporate communication strategy* repository.up.ac.za

<sup>15</sup> Drucker P.(1973) cited in [scienceofstrategy.org/main/content/peter-drucker-strategic-planning](http://scienceofstrategy.org/main/content/peter-drucker-strategic-planning)

It has been identified that three elements are required for well-planned communications: objectives; audience; and message<sup>16</sup>.

	Successful	Disappointing
Objectives	Communicate with clearly stated goal in mind.	Communicate for broadly defined or unclear objectives.
Audience	Communicate to clearly defined groups of people.	Communicate without first defining and understanding the people who should listen.
Message	Communicate a small number of clear, concise, consistent and memorable ideas.	Communicate a large number of different ideas without sufficient focus, and inconsistency.

Therefore, `delivering the right message at the right time` has never been more important. People are now bombarded with thousands of marketing messages every day and have learned to tune out those messages that they know to be irrelevant or unhelpful.

It is also vitally important that messages are delivered consistently, ensuring that the audience will, over time, become informed rather than confused.

Prior to embarking on any promotional activity to stakeholders and the public in general it is strongly recommended that an appropriate infrastructure is developed. The following recommendations on how this might be achieved provide a focus for discussion and subsequent agreements by OAAA:

- Identifying the target audience groups;
- Identifying and agreeing the benefits and key messages;
- Planning content and activities;
- Creating an OQF identity through branding;
- Setting up a URL for a Microsite or landing page (e.g. [www.oaaa.gov.om/oqf](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/oqf));
- Conducting an audit of existing communications channels;
- Creating a profile of available media;
- Preparing a comprehensive list of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs);
- Undertaking a baseline study of communication channels with stakeholders;
- Establishing a mechanism to carry out regular tracking surveys;
- Preparing a Communications Plan which sets out a schedule of activities.

<sup>16</sup> Europe in the Mediterranean, Fact Sheet 1, *the Communication Strategy*, [www.eie.gr](http://www.eie.gr)

## 2. Identifying Target Audience Groups

Communicating positive messages about the OQF will generate confidence and credibility in the development of the framework. Therefore, it will be extremely important to identify and engage appropriately with the target audiences throughout the two phases of the project. However, different target audiences will have different information needs and the message, the means and the level of communication must be tailored appropriately.

### 2.1 Influencers and Stakeholders

In order to avoid confusion, with respect to this OQF Communications Strategy, the following definitions have been used for Partner, Influencer and Stakeholder.

Partners	Influencer	Stakeholder
a person who takes part in an undertaking with another or others, especially in a business or firm with shared risks and profits <sup>17</sup>	The influencer is the individual whose effect on the decision is in some way significant or authoritative. <sup>18</sup>	Anyone who has an interest in your project or who will be affected by its deliverable or output. <sup>19</sup>

Partners and influencers are those that will influence the decisions on the direction of the OQF. For example, these are the organisations that will contribute representation on the Oversight Committee<sup>20</sup> and those which are represented on the OAAA Board. They are the strategic decision makers in terms of the OQF.

Partners and influencers have a high level of power and interest in the project. They should be regularly kept up-to-date with developments through regular briefings, meetings, presentations and workshops. They should be aware of any risks or issues associated with the project.

Stakeholders are those that will be most affected by the development of the OQF. Stakeholders should not only be identified but also placed into appropriate target groups in order that the level, content and means of communication are appropriate. For example, many of the stakeholders are from organisations that will ultimately be tasked to implement the requirements of the framework. It is therefore essential that they are regularly informed of progress and are consulted at appropriate stages in its development as this will help towards the successful establishment of the OQF. Other

<sup>17</sup> [https://www.google.co.uk/?gws\\_rd=ssl#q=definition+of+partner](https://www.google.co.uk/?gws_rd=ssl#q=definition+of+partner)

<sup>18</sup> Cambridge Dictionaries On-line: [dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english](https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english)

<sup>19</sup> Haughey D., <https://www.projectsart.co.uk/what-is-stakeholder-management.php>

<sup>20</sup> The Oversight Committee ensure that the development of the OQF is carried out in full consultation with key stakeholders (Terms of Reference 2014)

stakeholders, however, may not require regular updates and other forms of communication might be more appropriate.

Partners, influencers and stakeholders may include<sup>21</sup>:

Partners	Influencers	Stakeholders
Ministry of Education	Ministry of Education	Ministry of Information
Ministry of Higher Education	Ministry of Higher Education	Ministry of Commerce & Industry
Ministry of Manpower	Ministry of Health	Oman Research Council
Education Council	Ministry of Manpower	Oman Medical Speciality Board
	Ministry of Defence	Education Committee – Shura Council
	The Education Council	Education Committee – State Council
	Supreme Planning Council	Oman Quality Network in Higher Education (OQNHE)
	OAAA Board Members	Sultan Qaboos University
	Diwan of Royal Court	Private Higher Education Institutions
	OAAA	Vocational Institutions
	Ministry of Civil Service	Regional Authorities
	Oman Medical Speciality Board	Schools/Private Schools
	Sultan Qaboos University	Ambassadors & Cultural Attachés
	Employer Organisations	Professional Bodies
	Private Higher Education	Employer Organisations – e.g. Oman Chamber of Commerce
		OAAA staff
		Careers and Educational Guidance Organisations

Clearly, the identified influencers and stakeholders all form part of the key audience groups. As previously stated, it will be important that there is on-going communication throughout both phases of the project.

## 2.2 Internal Audience

A key group, which can occasionally be forgotten, is the internal audience. It should not be underestimated how important it is that all OAAA employees are comprehensively briefed regarding the OQF. Not only will this help staff carry out their roles, but they will also be able to provide advice on where there are possible areas of integration between OQF requirements and the existing quality assurance systems. In addition, having knowledge and insight of the OQF will help internal staff act as ‘Ambassadors’ of the OQF, cascading information down through their own networks and associations – ‘word of mouth’ continues to be a very productive means of communication.

<sup>21</sup> These will be updated as the OQF project progresses.

### **2.3 Wider Community**

Crucially, as the development process progresses, there will be a major requirement of successfully communicating with the wider community, including:

- Education and training practitioners;
- Employers and businesses;
- Learners;
- Parents;
- General public.

Targeting these audiences will present some communication challenges and resource implications. However, as already stated, if a solid infrastructure is put in place, these issues can be addressed and minimised. In addition, by identifying and clearly stating the benefits of the OQF to each audience group, and with careful planning, levels of awareness and understanding of the OQF will increase.

## **3. Benefits and Key Messages**

The benefits of establishing a national qualifications framework in Oman should be identified at an early stage in the development process.

An example of how a framework authority promotes the benefits their NQF is that of the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF). Several different groups have been identified and the benefits of the framework for each group has been listed and placed on the AQF website. The different groups are:

- Students;
- International Students;
- Employers;
- Education and Training Providers;
- Accrediting Authorities.

As an example, the AQF benefits for students is given below:

- the AQF encourages lifelong learning and assists students to plan their careers and learning at whatever stage they are within their lives and wherever they live;
- AQF qualifications allow students to start at the level that suits them and then build up their qualifications as their needs and interests develop and change over time;
- The AQF supports national standards in education and training;
- AQF qualifications are recognised across Australia;
- The AQF ensures understanding of what each qualification name and level means;
- The register of registered education and training providers are approved by government.

Source: [www.aqf.edu.au/aqf/about/benefits](http://www.aqf.edu.au/aqf/about/benefits)

A concise, clear key message which will be used to promote the values of the framework should also be drawn up and agreed. The key message must be used consistently and highlighted on the website and in written communications. For example, within Scotland the key message for the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is:

‘The Framework supports everyone in Scotland, including learners, learning providers and employers, by:

- helping people of all ages and circumstances access appropriate education and training so they can meet their full potential;
- helping employers, learners and the general public to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how qualifications relate to each other and to other forms of learning, and how different types of qualification can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce<sup>22</sup>.

It is recommended that at an early stage in its development the benefits of the OQF are identified, distilled into clear key messages and agreed for communication to the different target audience groups.

### **3.1 Content and Activity Planning**

Communication is difficult, if not impossible, without good content. Regardless of what type of tactics are used, content planning should be part of the process and quality content plays an increasingly important part in all forms of marketing and communications.

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<sup>22</sup> <http://scqf.org.uk/the-framework/aims-and-benefits/>

It is perhaps worthwhile providing this definition from the Content Marketing Institute (CMI):

*'Content marketing is a strategic approach focused on creating and distributing valuable, relevant and consistent content to attract and retain a clearly-defined audience.'*<sup>23</sup>

Content marketing is the art of communicating with audience groups without overtly selling. Therefore, instead of promoting products and services, information of real value is being communicated, providing insight and knowledge to the recipient. It seems clear that this type of approach would sit comfortably with the overall aims and positioning of the OQF. Some examples of approaches to content marketing are:

- Short instructional films;
- White papers;
- Video diaries;
- Case studies;
- Testimonials.

It is recommended that OAAA give consideration, with a view to reaching agreement, to the following activities:

- Producing appropriate marketing materials such as brochures, flyers, posters and display materials; giveaways` e.g pens, pencils, computer mats etc.
- Participating in exhibitions;
- Identifying speaking opportunities at conferences, seminars and business meetings;
- Writing a series of articles in a style suited to each audience group;
- Producing PowerPoint presentations and speaker notes;
- Identifying external OQF 'Champions' and 'Ambassadors' to disseminate messages through their own networks;
- Buying advertising space (budget permitting) in available media, including digital;
- Developing a mobile marketing campaign using SMS;
- Establishing web-based discussion forum;
- Organising a series of regional public roadshows;
- Having a symposium for education and training practitioners;
- Organising press interviews;
- Creating photo opportunities;

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<sup>23</sup> <http://contentmarketinginstitute.com/what-is-content-marketing/>

- Developing targets and key metrics in order to fully track, monitor and evaluate planned activities.

In addition to the above considerations, it is strongly recommended that a distinct social media presence is developed and established, at the earliest opportunity. This could be a crucial factor in successfully communicating the OQF to the wider public in Oman, particularly to the younger audience groups.

Understandably, some organisations are hesitant, and may have concerns, in fully engaging with social media. However, it is a medium that has its ear to the ground and can, undoubtedly, significantly affect perceptions. The digital landscape continues to evolve and has transformed communication into even more of a two-way process which, in turn, provides communicators with a wealth of valuable audience insight. It is also a medium that allows for easier measurement and evaluation than some traditional channels.

Clearly, a major consideration in the use of social media is that of human resource, as communicating effectively with a wide range of audiences, with different information needs, can be time-consuming. It is hugely important to:

- co-ordinate content;
- interact with your audience; and
- respond promptly to questions and comments.

#### **4. Creating an OQF Brand Identity**

It is essential that the OQF has a strong brand identity. The creation of a logo is often the fastest way of building brand recognition and, over time, will become the most powerful single visual brand asset for the OQF. It is recommended that a logo be developed that should:

- Be a clear reflection of the OQF brand positioning;
- Be memorable and distinctive, providing differentiation from others;
- Allow for easy recognition and associations;
- Be based on a strong creative idea;
- Be able to be used in a variety of ways – e.g. colour, black & white, large & small;
- Be able to be used in a variety of channels – e.g. print, digital, displays, merchandise.

A good logo accomplishes all of this and should provide clarity of focus and will represent the values of the brand and help build brand awareness. Due to its importance, OOOA may wish to give consideration on the best means for the creation of an appropriate logo for example by using in-house designers or by outsourcing the work.

Once the audience has an experience or engagement with the OQF, the logo will become a badge that will reflect their perceived expectations. OAAA can also influence these perceptions by ensuring the logo is used correctly and becomes a trustworthy symbol that the audience can rely on.

As it is imperative that the logo is always used consistently, it is recommended that a brand style guide is produced. Essentially, this guide would set out the rules on how the brand should be visually presented. These rules will inform employees, partner organisations, designers and printers on proper logo usage and should specify colour scheme, fonts, minimum size and logo clear zone.

Examples of the way in which a logo can be used to develop brand identity is given in *Appendix 2* which is supplied under separate cover with this report. Please note that this is not a suggestion for a logo but rather examples of how a logo can be used.

## **5. Microsite or Landing Page**

In order to make it as easy as possible for audience groups to access and retrieve information regarding the development of the new OQF, it is proposed that a fully branded microsite or landing page is created and maintained. The Microsite URL (Uniform Resource Locator) e.g. [www.oaaa.gov.om/oqf](http://www.oaaa.gov.om/oqf) would be featured in all OQF communication materials.

A microsite is a small group of pages with a unique address and links, and it usually acts as a subdivision of a larger online entity. It can be a unique domain, a sub-domain or a directory of an existing site. Typically, a microsite will feature in-depth content about a specific product, service, event or idea.

The main advantage of developing a microsite for the OQF is the ability to communicate a specific and targeted message, driving more relevant traffic to the new site. With unique branding, URL structure and content, a microsite can easily act as a stand-alone site that is free from associations with its related larger entity.

For this site to be successful, it should be populated with content that is relevant and valuable to the visitor and shouldn't simply duplicate content from the main OAAA site. Appropriate, fresh content should be added regularly, in order that audience groups continue to re-visit the site.

A further advantage of creating a bespoke microsite is the ability to more easily track and analyse the traffic, goals and success rate of pages or campaigns. This will assist in making improvements to the architecture of the microsite and will also help inform future OQF communication activities.

To provide focus to the discussions and agreements that are required, an example of how the microsite could look is also shown in *Appendix 2* (supplied under separate cover).

## 6. Channels of Communication

It is also vitally important that the role and influence of the media is not underestimated. It is therefore recommended that strong links with broadcast and print media are formed, or existing relationships enhanced, for the purpose of promoting the OQF and for the dissemination of relevant key messages.

### 6.1 Existing Channels of Communication

There will already be channels of communication, some already successfully utilised by OAAA's Media Committee that may be fit for the purpose of communicating information regarding both phases of the OQF Development Project. It is proposed that a brief audit of these channels is conducted to determine their current value and future suitability of carrying OQF messages.

For example these channels could include:

- Reviewing the design and architecture of OAAA Website [www.oaaa.gov.om](http://www.oaaa.gov.om) which is the natural home for OQF information;
- Ministry of Education Educational Portal [www.moe.gov.om](http://www.moe.gov.om) which already has an engaged audience with a committed interest in education;
- Ministry of Information [www.omaninfo.om](http://www.omaninfo.om) in order to widen communications reach and create further links;
- Other stakeholder channels, such as Sultan Qaboos University [www.squ.edu.om](http://www.squ.edu.om) to engage with academic staff and communicate with students, or Oman Chamber of Commerce [www.chamberoman.com](http://www.chamberoman.com) in order to reach businesses and industry;
- Oman News Agency [www.omannews.com](http://www.omannews.com) for the dissemination of news stories through its daily bulletins issued to subscribers;
- Regular events or conferences, such as Ghedex [www.ghedex.om](http://www.ghedex.om) or Edutrac [www.edutracom.com](http://www.edutracom.com).

In addition to utilising all identified existing channels, it is proposed that a regular monthly OQF newsletter is produced and distributed electronically. This e-newsletter could be a digest of information, comprising short articles with clear links to further content on the OQF microsite. Information on conducting a website review is contained in *Appendix 3*.

## **6.2 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

The use of Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) is a well-established tool that can be very effective, if used in the correct way. A dynamic FAQs page would provide valuable content to the proposed OQF microsite and it is recommended that this is developed, established and maintained as a significant communication tactic.

The questions, and answers, should be written in a style and tone that resonates with all audience groups. A factor in the success of many of the better FAQs pages is because the questions are well grouped and categorised. By breaking the questions down into common categories, visitors can easily find what they are looking for. For example:

- Sort questions by audience type to better serve individual needs;
- List the questions alphabetically, for ease of scanning;
- Group the FAQs by question type and give each group a heading.

However, care should be taken not to overload a FAQs page with too many questions. Visitors can be overwhelmed by this and prevented from finding value. A bad impression of the FAQs page could be damaging to the OQF brand. Nevertheless, if there is a requirement for a lot of questions, it may be worth considering calling the FAQs page something different, e.g. OQF Support Centre.

It may also be worth considering adding a feature where all stakeholders and the general public can email the OQF Department with questions that are not included in the FAQs, and receive a response from the Department within a specified timeframe.

It is also recommended that the FAQs are easily printable from the site.

## **6.3 Media Profile**

Oman has a mature and vibrant media sector encompassing both traditional and digital channels. It is evident that the OAAA Media Committee already has an excellent and established working relationship with Newspapers, Television and Radio. Therefore, the current situation offers ideal opportunities, particularly through traditional channels, to inform the wider public of the new qualifications framework. This topic is further discussed in section 6.4 and supplementary information on Oman's Media Analysis is provided as Appendix 4 along with additional information supplied under separate cover (Excel File).

## **6.4 Newspapers, Magazines, Television and Radio**

### **6.4.1 Newspapers and Magazines**

Newspapers are hugely popular in Oman where there are over twenty daily and weekly Arabic and English language titles. Being so popular with readers, means that it is no surprise that newspapers take up the vast majority of advertisers' budgets – in 2012 and 2013 around 85% of the annual advertising expenditure in Oman. The remaining expenditure is fairly evenly split between magazines, television, radio and outdoor.

With this in mind, it seems clear that newspapers should feature heavily in any forthcoming communications schedule, offering both advertising opportunities and, importantly, editorial coverage of the OQF.

A range of magazines and journals are published in Oman, including those with a focus on business, industry and the economy, e.g. *Business Today*. Titles such as this are worthy of consideration when seeking to communicate OQF messages to employers and employer organisations, as these audiences can often be difficult to reach.

### **6.4.2 Television and Radio**

Oman has two state-owned television stations and one privately-owned channel. The use of satellite receivers is permitted and stations from the UAE and elsewhere can be picked up. A wide audience can be reached through the medium of television, leading to increased awareness, understanding and credibility, particularly through interview appearances and broadcast news articles.

There are several Radio stations in Oman with both Arabic and English language networks, catering for diverse audience groups. The medium of radio presents an opportunity to widen the reach of OQF messaging, particularly with younger audience groups.

The following table illustrates the breakdown of spend<sup>24</sup>:

OMAN ADSPEND – MEDIA SPLIT – 2012/2013					
STATEX – OMAN CUMULATIVE QUANTITATIVE MONTORING					
Date – from January to December 2013					
Amount in: RO					
	2012		2013		
MEDIA	AMOUNT	% SHARE	AMOUNT	% SHARE	% CHANGE
Newspaper	95,121,604	85%	93,421,366	85%	-2%
Television	4,322,235	4%	3,330,924	3%	-23%
Magazine	4,009,465	4%	3,906,996	4%	-£%
Outdoor	5,106,573	5%	5,234,237	5%	2%
Radio	3,320,000	3%	3,506,000	3%	6%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>111,879,877</b>		<b>109,399,523</b>		

Source:mediate-oman.com

## 6.5 Social Media

Oman has a sophisticated telecommunications infrastructure with an 80% internet penetration from 2.6 million users<sup>25</sup>. Omanis are also relatively active on social media with 860,000 users having active accounts, 27% of the population. Interestingly, of these active members, 84% access their social accounts on mobile devices.

In recent years, there has been a huge worldwide increase in the daily use of social media and Oman is no exception to this.

Facebook [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) is used more frequently, in relation to the education sector, than any other social media platform in Oman and there is a large audience who are active and present on the platform. Within the social media landscape, many public sector organisations are active on Facebook.

There is also some activity on LinkedIn [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com) including the Ministry of Education. Also, Twitter [www.twitter.com](http://www.twitter.com) is a social platform that is used by some education institutions, e.g. Sultan Qaboos University. Both the Ministry of Higher Education and Ministry of Manpower are also active on Twitter.

There is an increased appetite to receive information by way of video content and this requirement is well-served by the You Tube [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) platform.

<sup>24</sup> <http://mediate-oman.com/media-scene-2014-15/>

<sup>25</sup> [www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm](http://www.internetworldstats.com/middle.htm)

More and more organisations, including several OQF stakeholders, are now establishing their own You Tube presence in order to meet this demand.

The use of Instagram [www.instagram.com](http://www.instagram.com) is also increasing. Instagram is an online mobile photo-sharing service that enables users to take pictures and share them on a variety of social networking platforms.

It should also be noted that WhatsApp [www.whatsapp.com](http://www.whatsapp.com) is extremely well used in Oman. It is a cross-platform mobile messaging application which allows for the exchange of messages without having to pay for SMS. In addition to basic messaging WhatsApp users can create groups, send unlimited images, video and audio messages.

The recent emergence of social media networks is nothing short of phenomenal and has now become impossible for organisations to ignore it as a viable communication channel.

## **7. Baseline Study**

As stated in the introduction, the launch event for the OQF development project was highly successful and was attended by many key stakeholders. The interest shown provides a solid foundation for ongoing communication and engagement with key stakeholders and influencers. It is recognised that they will play an integral part in the development and establishment of the new framework and its ultimate communication to the general public in Oman.

With that in mind, it is recommended that an initial quantitative stakeholder Baseline Study is undertaken, followed by a series of regular tracking surveys.

The benefit of establishing benchmarks is the setting of a baseline or standard that can be used to identify where the communication has been successful or, conversely, where improvements are required. This approach also helps with setting goals, informing future activities and measuring performance.

### **7.1 Methodology**

It is suggested that the methodology for a Baseline Study is the construction of a short, simple questionnaire in order to determine the following:

- Current levels of awareness and understanding of OQF;
- Perceptions regarding the relevance and credibility of OQF;
- Preferred methods of communication of future OQF information.

The survey would then be carried out by one of the following methods:

- Online (e.g. [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com));
- Telephone interviews;
- Self-completion questionnaires.

The respondents' answers would then be analysed and the subsequent findings would provide the required baseline levels.

## **7.2 Stakeholders' Database**

If not already available, it is proposed that a comprehensive database of key stakeholders and relevant influencers is prepared and, if possible, segmented into audience types. This database would then form the target audience for the initial baseline study. As the development of the OQF progresses, other distinct audience groups can easily be added to the database for their participation in future phases of the tracking survey.<sup>26</sup>

## **7.3 Regular Tracking Surveys**

Having carried out the initial baseline study, there would then be the opportunity to establish a regular tracking survey, targeting the same audience groups. In this case, it is recommended that the survey is undertaken every six months to gain sufficient information without `consultation/survey overload.

During each survey phase, the same core questions would be asked and the findings would then be compared with the original baseline statistics. This would identify where progress or improvements had occurred, e.g. an increase in the perceived credibility of OQF. Similarly, any areas of concern would also be evident in the findings of the survey.

In addition to the core questions, there would also be the opportunity to include 'ad hoc' questions, from time to time, which could be used to provide further, valuable insight. The use of tracker surveys can assist greatly in informing future communication activities.

More information on a Baseline Study is given in *Appendix 5*.

## **8. Resources**

Financial resources for communication of the OQF will need to be made for the means of communication such as leaflets, logo, database that OAAA decide is most appropriate for the OQF.

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<sup>26</sup> The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership found such a database invaluable. Previously they used `Training Manager Pro`, they now use `Learnsmarker` a cloud based system.

## 9. Summary

The Communication Strategy highlights the importance of a systematic approach to communication about the OQF. It sets out several areas where strategic decisions need to be taken before undertaking any promotional activity. These decisions relate to identifying and classifying the target audience groups, identifying and agreeing the benefits and key messages of the OQF, creating a brand identity through the creation of a logo and protocols for its use, and the allocation of financial resources. It also highlights areas for development for example, for a dedicated microsite or landing page, for content and a schedule of activities. It sets out the possible means of communication and recommends that a Baseline Study takes place early in the development of the OQF which is repeated at specified intervals in order to gauge the increase in awareness and to ascertain the means of communication that works and that which doesn't work.

This Communications Strategy identifies a number of activities that should be taken forward at an early stage in the development of the OQF. It is recommended that priority is given to identifying and classifying the stakeholders, identifying and developing the benefits and key messages, creating the brand image and undertaking the initial Baseline Study.

In summary, a two-stage approach is recommended:

Stage 1:

- Ensure that a solid infrastructure is in place, including OQF identity, benchmark information, an established major source of information (microsite), agreed key messages, a social media presence, and content and activity plans.
- Continue the key activity of regular communications with stakeholders and influencers, including OAAA staff.

Stage 2:

- Develop and implement an integrated, multi-channel approach to communicating OQF to the wider public.
- Monitor and evaluate these activities in order to inform future communications planning.

An example of a timescale within a six month Communication Plan might look like this:

Activity	November	December	January	February	March	April
Agree Communication Strategy	✓					
Identify Target Groups	Completed					
Classify Target Audience Groups and agree classification	✓	✓				
Agree the priority of communication for the Target Audience Group for the period of the communication plan		✓				
Develop stakeholder database			✓	✓		
Consider and Agree means and frequency of communication with each classified Target Audience Groups.		✓				
Identify the benefits of the framework for Oman for different audiences e.g learners, employers, regulatory bodies, Ministries etc	✓	✓	✓	✓		
Develop the key messages for the OQF	✓	✓	✓			
Agree the benefit and the key messages of the OQF			✓			
Create a logo for the OQF		✓	✓	✓		
Develop protocols for the use of the OQF logo			✓	✓		
Agree the logo for the OQF and the protocols for its use				✓		
Develop printed materials for the OQF with logo e.g paper, business cards				✓	✓	
Develop appropriate content for the OQF website and printed materials, e.g leaflets			✓	✓	✓	✓
Consider and agree the required marketing materials for the period of the			✓	✓		

Activity	November	December	January	February	March	April
Communication Plan						
Develop marketing materials using logo				✓	✓	✓
Commence Baseline Study Develop Questions and methodology for study		✓	✓			
Agree methodology and questions	✓	✓				
Distribute Baseline Study to stakeholders and influencers (see appendix 5)		✓	✓			
Analyse results of Baseline Study					✓	✓
Review existing OQF Website to identify gaps etc	✓	✓				
Use developed content and fill gaps				✓	✓	✓

FINAL DRAFT

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## Appendix 1: Government Higher Educational Institutes

Government Higher Educational Institutes	
Sultan Qaboos University (SQU)	
Colleges of Applied Sciences (CAS)	
Muscat Higher College of Technology	
Six Regional Colleges of Technology	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Niswa</li> <li>2. Musanna</li> <li>3. Shinas</li> <li>4. Ibra</li> <li>5. Ibri</li> <li>6. Salalah</li> </ol>
Six Regional Vocational Training (VTC) Centres	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A'Seeb</li> <li>2. Saham</li> <li>3. Shinas</li> <li>4. Sur</li> <li>5. Ibri</li> <li>6. Al-Buraemi</li> </ol>
Two Fisheries Training Institutes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Al-Khaboura</li> <li>2. Salalah</li> </ol>
Institute of Health Science (IHS)	
Oman Health Information Management Institute (OHIMI)	
Oman Assistant Pharmacy Institute	
Oman Nursing Regional Nursing Institutes (11)	
Military Technological College (MTC)	
Institute of Shari`a Sciences	
The College of Banking & Financial Studies	
The Institute of Topographical Science	
Sultan Qaboos Naval Academy	
National Defence College	
Airforce Technical College	
Armed Forces Medical College	

## **Appendix 2: Examples of identity branding and microsite (under separate cover)**

## **Appendix 3: Conducting a Website Review**

When undertaking reviews of websites, the approach involves the following steps:

### **1. Internal website review to agree site goals and audiences**

This involves:

- Identifying the purpose of the site or service, the types of users of the site, and the goals that you want those users to achieve;
- Establishing the audiences For each of the main areas / functional parts of the site and identifying the goals that you want them to achieve;
- Identifying if there are any gaps in the existing website that need to be filled to reach the identified goal;
- Identifying if there are any existing known problem areas that need to be

The purpose of this work is to establish a review framework that can be used to test the site with real users to ascertain its effectiveness in delivering the identified goals. This will help to identify unknown problem areas and provide recommendations for further improvements.

### **2. Website usability review**

The usability review is normally undertaken by a specialist company who undertakes website reviews.

What they will do is:

- Review the internal website review findings and use this as a basis to provide a testing approach.. They will provide a proposal outlining the testing approach they recommend and the questions and tasks that will be set for users. Such organisations work collaboratively with their clients to agree the final test script to be used;
- Recruit users to participate in user testing based on the audiences you have defined;
- User test key areas of site to ascertain its effectiveness;
- Ask users how they feel about the service and find out if there is anything that they think would improve it;
- Review google analytics and current performance activity;
- Provide recommendations that can then be acted on.

## **Appendix 4: Oman Media Analysis – Supporting Notes and Media Analysis (under separate cover)**

### **Introduction**

As outlined in the proposed OQF Communications Strategy, Oman has a mature and vibrant media sector encompassing both traditional and digital channels, offering ideal opportunities to inform the wider Omani public of the new qualifications framework.

The strategy includes the recommendation that, in order to communicate key OQF messages to identified audiences, an integrated, multi-channel approach is developed and implemented.

Although the advertising budget for this project has yet to be confirmed, the detail contained in the (traditional) media analysis spreadsheet is intended to supplement the information already provided in the Communications Strategy document (the Oman Media Analysis is supplied under separate cover and includes analysis of television, radio, newspapers and magazines).

### **Television**

Oman has two state-owned Television stations (Oman TV 1 & 2) and one privately-owned channel (Majan TV), all of which are broadcast in Arabic.

With a substantial reach of almost 750,000 viewers and a wide and relevant demographic profile, Oman TV 1 provides an appropriate communication channel to promote the OQF. A variety of commercial advertising slots, ranging from 10 to 60 seconds, are available. Interview appearances and broadcast news articles can also be accommodated.

A wide and diverse audience can be reached through the medium of television, leading to increased OQF awareness, understanding and credibility.

### **Radio**

Radio is a popular broadcast medium in Oman. There are several stations with both Arabic and English language networks. Although catering for diverse audience groups, radio offers a perfect opportunity to extend the reach of OQF messaging with younger members of the public.

By advertising on the proposed seven radio stations, a balanced campaign would be achieved and would also support communications through other channels including newspapers and television.

## **Newspapers**

Clearly, newspapers are hugely popular in Oman where there are over 20 daily and weekly Arabic and English language titles. It is not surprising that newspapers take up the vast majority of advertisers' budgets – around 85% of the annual advertising expenditure in Oman.

There is no doubt that newspapers should feature heavily in any OQF communications schedule, offering both advertising opportunities and editorial coverage.

The proposed schedule of 11 newspaper titles includes broadsheet and tabloid formats and has been selected to provide a wide readership profile, including the business community. Advertising and editorial opportunities are outlined, as are any available education features or supplements. Costs and copy dates have also been provided.

## **Magazines**

To complement the schedule of newspaper advertising and to specifically target employers and businesses, it is proposed that *Business Today* and *Oman Economic Review* are included in the communications mix. Both are published monthly, in English, and cover a range of industry sectors.

Titles such as these are definitely worthy of inclusion when seeking to communicate OQF messages to employers and employer organisations, as these audiences can often be challenging to reach.

## **Digital**

Please note that digital channels and social media have not been included in the proposals at this time.

## Appendix 5: Baseline Study & Regular Tracking Surveys: Guidelines

### 1. Underlying Principles

The Baseline Study and Regular Tracking Surveys recommended in relation to the OQF Development Project should be based on the following underlying principles:

- Asking questions which will provide relevant and actionable outcomes;
- Deriving data which is accurate, representative and robust by means of:
  - Implementing an appropriate sample size and distribution strategy;
  - Applying appropriate research methodologies.

### 2. Asking Questions that Provide Relevant & Actionable Outcomes

The **Baseline Study** would incorporate questions which would serve the following purposes:

- To ask a range of questions which could be repeated through time in subsequent Tracking Surveys;
- To ask questions which are of specific relevance to the period of time around the Baseline Study (i.e. which may not be asked again in future Tracking Surveys).

Thereafter, the **Tracking Surveys** would incorporate two types of questions:

- Core questions, i.e. questions which would be asked on an ongoing basis through the program of Tracking Research;
- Ad hoc questions, i.e. questions which would be specific to a particular Tracking Survey phase.

It is also anticipated that core and ad hoc questions may be asked of all audiences or only some (targeted) audiences.

This approach would provide a highly flexible research tool which would not only allow the tracking of data through time, but would also provide the opportunity to examine issues which are of particular importance at specific points in time and/or for specific audiences.

In all cases, however, questions must be carefully framed in order that provide outputs which are relevant to the Framework **and** which can be acted upon.

### 3. Deriving Data Which Is Accurate, Representative & Robust

#### Sample Size & Distribution

It is anticipated that a number of audiences would be targeted as part of the Baseline Study and Regular Tracking Surveys, including:

- Stakeholders and influencers
- Education and training practitioners
- Employers and businesses
- Learners
- Parents of learners
- The general public

The portfolio of stakeholders and influencers is *relatively* limited in nature. Therefore, it is recommended that as high a proportion as possible of this audience is targeted for the research. Even if the *actual number* of interviews is relatively small, the targeting of a high proportion of respondents within this target audience would result in information which is accurate, representative and robust (on the basis of the principles of the finite population correction, which takes account of the accuracy of data gathered based on the proportion of a population participating in a research study).

The potential number of participants for each of the remaining audiences (i.e. education and training practitioners, employers and businesses, learners, parents of learners and the general public) is such that the finite population correction would have little impact and, accordingly, a larger sample would be required for each audience.

Typically, a minimum sample of 250 completed questionnaires should be targeted for each audience as this would provide sufficiently accurate, representative and robust outcomes **for each audience** and, in addition, would allow comparisons to be drawn **between audiences** (for example, between education/training practitioners and learners).

#### Applying Appropriate Research Methodologies

It is of critical importance that the methodological approaches adopted derive high levels of response/participation in order to promote the accuracy, representativeness and robustness of data gathered.

Based on extensive experience, it is recommended that the following methodological framework is adopted:

<u>Target Audience</u>	<u>Research Method</u>
Stakeholders & influencers	Telephone interviews
Education & training practitioners	Telephone interviews
Employers & businesses	Telephone interviews
Learners	Face-to-face interviews
Parents	Face-to-face interviews
The general public	Face-to-face interviews

There is the potential for alternative methodologies to be considered, particularly in relation to the derivation of information from *stakeholders* and *influencers*. More specifically, consideration could be given to using self-completion methodologies – either through the completion of an online or paper based questionnaire. Whilst these methodological approaches are attractive from a cost perspective, there is a danger that they may result in a low response rates, thereby impacting upon the accuracy, representativeness and robustness of any data gathered.

In applying appropriate research methodologies, it is critical that – where these are based on personal interview (either by telephone or face-to-face) – interviews are carried out by trained Researchers and, in particular, those who are conducting these interviews:

- Have appropriate skills and knowledge in conducting interviews
- Are briefed before the interviewing process
- Are supervised and monitored during the interview process
- Have their performance reviewed after the interview process is completed

The above processes would promote the integrity of the research process.

#### **4. Scheduling of the Research Process**

It is recommended that the **Baseline Studies** and **Regular Tracking Surveys** are implemented on a phased basis, i.e.:

- Stage I – stakeholders and influencers
- Stage II – education and training practitioners
- Stage III – employers and businesses, learners, parents and the general public

In particular, it is recommended that the **Baseline Studies** at the commencement of each of these stages are undertaken on a six monthly basis, i.e.:

- Phase I – Month 1
- Phase II – Month 7
- Phase III – Month 13

Thereafter, it is recommended that subsequent **Tracking Surveys** are undertaken on a six monthly basis, i.e. two surveys per year for each audience.

The implementation of six monthly gaps between survey phases would ensure that changing and emerging perceptions, needs and aspirations can be quickly identified through the core and ad hoc questions asked during the research process.