Oman Accreditation Council

THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

Approved 2004
(Under review in 2008)
National Qualifications Framework

i) Introduction

Oman’s National Qualifications Framework is a key part of the new system of Quality Assurance, as it sets the standards for academic awards for all categories of institutions as described in Chapter One.

The Qualifications Framework is designed to provide consistency in programme requirements and award titles, as well as to provide equivalence of standards in comparison with respected international institutions of Higher Education. The framework is designed specifically for the Oman context and establishes policy regarding the learning outcomes expected in Higher Education, with particular emphasis on thinking and problem solving.

The Qualifications Framework is based on the assumption that students entering Higher Education will have completed a full programme of Secondary Education and will have acquired the knowledge and skills to participate effectively in their chosen field of study in Higher Education.

In order to meet the admission requirements for Higher Education, it will be necessary for some students to complete Foundation studies.

Foundation studies are undertaken prior to admission to Higher Education programmes, and are not considered part of Higher Education programmes.

All students applying for entry to an institution of Higher Education must meet the entry requirements of that institution, including the minimum required grade point average.

Students who have completed advanced studies beyond Year 12 in Secondary School (whether or not there is a formal transfer arrangement between the new institution and the institution at which the student completed advanced studies) and can demonstrate to the receiving institution that they have completed equivalent work with required competencies should be granted Advanced Standing by the receiving institution; that is, be given credit for work previously completed that is equivalent to specific components of a Higher Education programme. It should be noted that the concept of Advanced Standing is based on the idea of Transfer Credit for a formal course of studies, NOT on Credit for Prior Learning, which could involve credit for informal self-study or for work experience.
ii) Levels of the Framework

The Qualifications Framework contains six levels of postsecondary education, including four undergraduate and two postgraduate levels.

The term “Level” is used to refer to a degree of achievement in academic progress on a scale, with gradations representing the extent of acquisition of knowledge, conceptual understanding, competencies and practical skills. The scale below starts with learning outcomes expected of students in their first year of postsecondary education at Level One and progresses to Level Six, which specifies the advanced scholarship expected of graduates from Doctoral programmes.

### Undergraduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Credit Points</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Normal Minimum Time</th>
<th>Award Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1 Year</td>
<td>(Certificate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>240</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>2 Years</td>
<td>Diploma (includes Associate Degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>360</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>3 Years</td>
<td>Advanced Diploma (includes Scottish Degree)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>480</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>4 Years</td>
<td>Bachelor's Degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1 Year at Level 4</td>
<td>Graduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Postgraduate

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Credit Points</th>
<th>Credit Hours</th>
<th>Normal Minimum Time</th>
<th>Award Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 5</td>
<td>150-180</td>
<td>30-45</td>
<td>1–2 yrs after Bachelor’s</td>
<td>Master’s Degree *</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>120</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1 Year at Level 5</td>
<td>Postgraduate Diploma</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>2 – 4 Yrs after Master’s</td>
<td>Doctorate</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- Note: A duration of 180 credit points (45 credit hours) is the norm for the Master’s Degree; however, students who have completed a bachelor’s programme in the same discipline may be allowed to reduce their Master’s programme to 150 credit points (30 credit hours).

The framework utilises a credit point system (with the equivalent in credit hours shown for explanatory purposes). One credit point represents the learning outcomes expected to be achieved by an average learner at the level concerned in 10 hours of work. 120 credit points has been selected as the number to be used for the equivalent of one year’s full time academic work. Widely used in the UK and US...
systems, this equivalence (120 credit points = one year full time academic work) is easily divisible into semesters, or quarters, or individual subjects.

The emphasis on credit points rather than credit hours puts the focus appropriately on what has been learned (the outcome) rather than how long it takes (the input).

Studies at each level should lead to achievement of the knowledge and skills required for that level, and also provide the foundation for progression to the next level.

Where an intermediate exit award is granted, for example at Level 2 (Diploma) in a 4 year programme (eg., Bachelor’s degree), the award should be regarded as a worthwhile qualification in its own right, and students should have useful knowledge and marketable skills on exit. The adoption of a four-year undergraduate programme structure culminating in a Bachelor’s degree is consistent with common practice in the region and abroad.

Normally, the Graduate Diploma is taken after completion of the Bachelor’s degree at the same level as the Bachelors degree (Level 4), but in a different speciality or in a new field. The Postgraduate Diploma is taken in the same field after completion of the Bachelor’s degree. Postgraduate Diploma studies are at the Masters level (Level 5), but do not involve the completion of a thesis.

iii) Generic Competencies

A brief statement of expected outcomes based on best practice internationally is included at each level of the Qualifications Framework.

These statements are generic descriptions grouped under the headings: Knowledge, Cognitive Skills, and General Competencies. These include making appropriate use of Information Technology.

The Framework does not encompass subject specific outcomes, which are to be defined by the institution for each programme.

Student assessment methods should provide evidence of achievement of both generic and subject specific programme requirements.

Outcomes should also reflect the policy priorities of Oman’s system of Higher Education, including familiarity with Omani cultural traditions and reconciliation of those traditions with the need to compete effectively in the global economy.

Graduates should have the ability and commitment to engage in lifelong learning.

iv) Implementation

Institutions offering programmes that are not consistent with the Framework will be expected to achieve compliance for any new student intakes commencing after the adoption of the new Framework.
Students who are currently enrolled in a noncompliant programme should be permitted to complete the programme according to the structure in place at the time they originally enrolled in the programme.

v) Overseas Universities Operating in Oman

In order to receive an academic award issued by an external partner institution, students must meet all the requirements of the external institution.

At the same time, all programmes offered within Oman, including those offered through external institutions, must meet the requirements specified in this document.

Where an institution in Oman offers programmes in partnership with an overseas university and the awards conferred are those of the overseas university, the award title of the overseas university may be used, provided that the overseas university’s regulations for degrees do not fall below the requirements described in the Oman Qualifications Framework.

vi) Verification of Standards

It is part of the internal quality assurance responsibility of all Higher Education institutions, and a pre-requisite for accreditation, to obtain independent verification that standards are consistently achieved.

Strategies used to verify standards should include specific, objective measures such as check marking of student assignments, external reviews of departments and programmes, assessment of programmes by students and graduates, and reports from employers on the skills of graduates.

vii) Outcomes

Note that all levels include subject specific learning outcomes as defined by the institution for the particular field of study.

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL ONE: CERTIFICATE

Studies at Level One are more advanced than studies in the final year of Secondary School. The Level One certificate is an award carrying 120 credit points (30 credit hours), following one year of full time study in Higher Education after completion of Secondary Education; and, if applicable, after the Foundation Year.

This award should be regarded as a worthwhile qualification in its own right, and students should have useful knowledge and marketable skills on exit.

a) Knowledge

Knowledge outcomes include familiarity with, and the ability to interpret, significant information, major issues and contemporary events in the field.
b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include an understanding of, and ability to apply, concepts, principles and theories in the analysis of issues and to solve uncomplicated problems.

Cognitive skills are evidenced by familiarity with the major techniques of enquiry, and the ability to gather, analyse and report on qualitative and quantitative data.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to communicate effectively, orally and in writing, both for personal communication and for formal reports.

Students should have sufficient mastery of mathematical concepts and the skills to analyse data and solve problems.

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL TWO: DIPLOMA

The Level 2 Diploma is an award carrying 240 credit points (60 credit hours), following two years of full time study in Higher Education and may cover a number of subject fields or focus on one or two fields of specialisation. It includes recognition of the Associate Degree designation.

Normally, more than 50% of studies are in the specialised field, with additional studies in related areas, general skill development, and general education.

All programmes should facilitate general skills in thinking, problem-solving and communication, as well as knowledge and skills in the core subject areas.

a) Knowledge

Expected outcomes include knowledge of significant bodies of information in the general field as well as in some areas of specialisation.

Students’ knowledge should include the scope and nature of the field of study and of the subjects within it, and of principal relationships between the field and other areas of knowledge, as well as critical understanding of well-established principles of enquiry.

Students must have an awareness of major issues within the field and how those issues might be addressed.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include an understanding of the central underlying concepts, principles and theories of the field of study, and the ability to apply them in a new context, including, where appropriate, in an employment context.

It is important that students gain awareness of the limits of their knowledge, and of how this influences interpretations based on that knowledge.
c) **General Competencies**

General competencies include the ability to use information and communications technology in accessing, analysing and reporting to diverse audiences on relevant information.

Students must be able to identify and initiate responses to their own learning needs and to work effectively, both independently and in groups.

d) **Qualities of Holders of Diplomas:**

Holders of diplomas should have the ability to use a range of established techniques to analyse information and to propose solutions to clearly defined problems. They can draw conclusions based on valid evidence and communicate the results of their analyses accurately and reliably.

**OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL THREE: ADVANCED DIPLOMA**

The Level 3 Advanced Diploma is an award carrying 360 credit points (90 credit hours) following three years of full time study.

Programmes should provide a broad understanding of the subject or discipline field as a whole and provide more advanced work in at least one area of specialisation, perhaps with a vocational focus.

Students should understand, and be able to apply to new situations, the concepts and principles that provide the theoretical underpinning of knowledge in their field.

a) **Knowledge**

Knowledge outcomes include mastery of the significant bodies of information within a given field, and in-depth understanding of the major specialisations, including awareness of key issues, and of how to address them.

Students must understand the way in which new knowledge is developed and should be aware of significant relationships between their field of study and related areas of knowledge.

b) **Cognitive Skills**

Cognitive skills include the understanding of, and ability to apply, key concepts and principles in interpreting information and addressing issues in, and outside, the original learning context. They should have a critical understanding of the principal methods of investigation and how to apply them to new problems.

Students should have an awareness of the provisional nature of knowledge and an ability to take this into account in the interpretation, analysis and resolution of problems.
c) **General Competencies**

Students should have the ability to communicate information effectively, to develop arguments and analyse data in a variety of forms appropriate to different issues and audiences. The ability to make effective use of information technology is critical.

Students should have leadership capability and teamwork skills.

**d) Qualities of Holders of Advanced Diplomas:**

Graduates should have the ability to take initiative in identifying problems requiring resolution and to take appropriate remedial action.

They should be able to undertake further training on their own initiative in order to develop new skills and remain up to date with developments in the field.

**OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FOUR: BACHELOR’S DEGREE**

The Bachelor’s degree is an award carrying 480 credit points (120 credit hours) following four years of full time study or equivalent.

The Bachelor’s degree programme should provide a balance of breadth and depth, with at least one, and preferably two, main subjects or disciplines taken to completion at Level 4, along with lower level studies broadly related to the field of study.

Some programmes may have a vocational focus intended to qualify graduates to practice in a profession.

Graduates are able to communicate effectively orally and in writing.

Graduates should understand the culture and traditions of Oman in general and in relation to their academic studies.

**a) Knowledge**

Knowledge outcomes include comprehensive understanding of the field of study as a whole, including links to related knowledge in other disciplines and professional areas.

Graduates should have general familiarity with the latest developments at the forefront of the field and detailed knowledge of at least one significant area.

Knowledge outcomes include an understanding of the provisional nature of knowledge and of the way in which new knowledge is developed and applied in the analysis and resolution of problems.

Where studies involve professional preparation, graduates should have knowledge of relevant Omani laws, regulations and conventions. They should also understand in general the similarities and differences between Omani requirements and those in effect in appropriate jurisdictions abroad.
b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the ability to apply established concepts, theories and modes of enquiry in a given discipline or professional field, in synthesizing and interpreting information and evaluating possible conclusions.

Cognitive skills involve the ability to analyse problems independently, drawing on conceptual skills, while taking into account the provisional nature of knowledge. Graduates should have the ability to devise solutions to complex problems and to communicate and explain findings effectively.

c) General Competencies

Students must acquire the ability to systematically gather, analyse and interpret relevant qualitative and quantitative data from a range of sources, including original sources, and scholarly or professional literature.

Graduates should have the ability to communicate effectively and to develop persuasive arguments, using different modes of communication in the language of instruction.

It is critical that graduates have the routine ability to use the most appropriate communications technology in gathering, interpreting and communicating information.

d) Qualities of Holders of the Bachelor's Degree:

Holders of the Bachelor’s degree should be able to take responsibility for managing their own learning and should be able to keep up to date with new developments in their fields.

They should be able to make sound judgments about complex issues, drawing on the knowledge and skills developed in their programmes, and to communicate conclusions effectively.

They should be able to take initiative in the analysis and solving of problems in ways that demonstrate creativity in formulating problems, evaluating evidence, and developing persuasive arguments and sound solutions.

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FOUR: GRADUATE DIPLOMA

The Graduate Diploma is an award for studies of one academic year and includes 120 credit points (30 credit hours), after completion of a Bachelor’s degree or an Advanced Diploma. The award is intended for graduates who wish to undertake additional work to ensure familiarity with the latest developments in their field or to extend their studies to a different area.

The outcomes expected are comparable to those of graduates from the Bachelor’s degree programme.
OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FIVE: MASTER’S DEGREE

The Master’s degree is an award carrying a minimum of 180 credit points, (45 credit hours) normally following at least one year, and up to three years, of advanced study. The prerequisite is completion of a Bachelor’s degree in a related field.

Work at this level requires familiarity with the latest advances in knowledge in a given field; advanced skills in independent enquiry; and the capacity to apply knowledge effectively in new and unpredictable situations. A Master’s programme may involve undertaking a dissertation or major supervised research investigation; or, it may involve a combination of coursework and a major project. The Master’s research project must involve the application of knowledge to a matter of significance.

The Masters degree may be primarily research oriented or may involve substantial coursework, as well as the completion of a major project.

a) Knowledge

Expected knowledge outcomes include acquisition of a substantial body of knowledge, including critical awareness of current problems, theories and developments.

Graduates are expected also to have acquired knowledge of the outcomes of recent research and to understand its impact on the store of established knowledge. Graduates should be aware of new issues emerging as a result of discoveries in recent research.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the ability to evaluate critically recent research, assess its validity, reliability and significance; and, where relevant, the ability to propose alternative interpretations and directions for further research.

It is important that cognitive skills include the ability to apply relevant concepts, principles and research techniques to new issues and problems in creative ways.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to use a range of research and problem solving techniques. Graduates should have knowledge of how research techniques are best used and of how to adapt research techniques to create, interpret and apply new knowledge.

General competencies also encompass the ability to develop comprehensive reports and concise public communications, as well as to report effectively on complex interpretations and make recommendations.

Graduates should have the ability to lead teams to effectively address and resolve complex and/or controversial issues.
d) Qualities of Holders of Masters Degrees:

Holders of Master’s degrees should have the ability to act independently and creatively in analysing problems. They should be able to apply their knowledge and skills in the investigation of problems and development of solutions.

Holders of Master’s degrees should have the ability to make sound judgments on complex issues and communicate their conclusions effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Successful graduates accept responsibility for their own learning and future professional development. They are characterised by commitment and the ability to work in cooperation with others in identifying issues and resolving problems.

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL FIVE: POSTGRADUATE DIPLOMA

The Postgraduate Diploma is an award for studies of one academic year with 120 credit points (30 credit hours). The prerequisite for admission is the completion of a Bachelor’s degree. This programme is for graduates wishing to update or broaden their academic background, or to convert their area of expertise to a different field.

Postgraduate Diploma programmes normally do not include a dissertation requirement (in contrast to the Master’s degree), but may include a major or minor project.

The outcomes expected are comparable to those for a Master’s degree, except for the demonstrated capacity to carry out and report on a major research project.

OUTCOMES FOR LEVEL SIX: DOCTORATE

The Doctoral Degree is an award carrying at least 300 credit points (75 credit hours) for a programme of advanced studies. The Doctoral degree is normally taken over at least two years and up to four years, following completion of a Master’s degree.

Doctoral programmes require advanced independent scholarship involving the creation, interpretation and application of new knowledge, as well as understanding of the most recent developments in a major field of enquiry. Advanced research skills and comprehensive reporting skills are critical.

A doctoral programme may be based on a major research project, or a combination of advanced coursework and thesis.

The award granted for a research degree is normally a PhD. The term PhD is not used for programmes in professional fields. Professional doctoral degree programmes include a substantial coursework component and the award title usually includes reference to the professional field involved. Examples are: DEng, (Engineering) DBus (Business), DBA, (Business Administration, and EdD (Education).
a) Knowledge

Knowledge outcomes include acquisition of a substantial body of knowledge at the forefront of a given field, as well as its relationship to relevant other fields.

b) Cognitive Skills

Cognitive skills include the ability to identify a problem, the resolution of which will result in new knowledge or a significant development in professional practice. Doctoral students must be able to analyse the various dimensions of a problem through the application of relevant theories, principles and concepts. They must be able to design and carry out an investigation of the problem at a level of performance which satisfies experienced practitioners in the field.

c) General Competencies

General competencies include the ability to apply relevant research techniques to significant new developments; and, where necessary, to refine and extend existing research techniques.

Doctoral students must develop the ability to communicate results and explain the significance of original research or of advanced scholarship, so that the product is of sufficient quality for publication in a reputable journal.

d) Qualities of Holders of Doctoral Degrees:

The Doctoral graduate should have the skills and ability to undertake original research at an advanced level, independently and as a member of a team. Research should contribute significantly to the development of new knowledge, techniques or professional practice.

The graduate should be able to make informed judgments on complex issues requiring application of concepts and insights from their own field and related fields. They must be able to communicate conclusions effectively to specialist and non-specialist audiences.

Successful graduates of Doctoral programmes accept responsibility for their own learning and professional development. They are characterised by commitment and the ability to work in cooperation with others in resolving problems of mutual interest.

Having set out the standards for academic awards in the context of a National Qualifications Framework in this chapter, we now complete this section of PART ONE on standards with Chapter Three on the procedures for approval and accreditation of Institutions of Higher Education. The second section on standards, Chapter Four, contains a description of best international practices to be applied to the Oman context.