

**An exploration of structural factors and personal  
agency in the education to work transition  
context in Oman**

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## **ABSTRACT**

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Oman, as with many other countries in the Middle East region, is facing a ‘demographic bulge’ which is resulting in a growth in youth unemployment. A significant increase in the number of graduates entering the labour market also means a more competitive environment for qualified job seekers. While graduates have traditionally sought employment in the public sector, the government is promoting ‘Omanisation’; a range of localisation policies to increase the number of Omanis being employed in the private sector and reduce dependence on an expatriate workforce. Research (Salehi-Isfahani-Dhillon, 2008; Al Lamki, 1998) suggests that despite the government’s efforts, graduates entering the regional job market have not been engaging with efforts to promote localisation. While structural factors and agency have been explored in other transition context research, this study explores these areas within the Oman education to work transition context. This research used a combination of research methods (focus groups and a self-completion questionnaire) with final year Omani students enrolled on business-related degree programmes in four different institutions in Muscat. The findings suggest that while students perceive structural factors such as government, labour market, the education system, gender and socio-cultural factors to be influencing and shaping their transition context, there is a suggestion that their own abilities and efforts have a role to play, reflecting evidence of agency in their transition behaviour. It is proposed that concepts such as Evans (2007) “bounded agency” provide a useful basis to explore the stirrings of active individualisation within the social structures of the Omani education to work transition context.

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## CONTENTS

<b>ABSTRACT .....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>LIST OF TABLES .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION .....</b>	<b>4</b>
1.1 Research context.....	7
1.2 Research objectives .....	12
1.3 Contribution of the research .....	14
1.4 Research overview .....	17
<b>CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW .....</b>	<b>19</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	19
2.2 The study of youth as a life stage .....	19
2.3 Theoretical approaches to studying youth transitions.....	22
2.3.1 Historical perspectives in youth transition literature .....	22
2.3.2 Structural factors and agency in youth transitions.....	29
2.4 Youth transitions in Oman and the Middle East.....	35
2.4.1 The role of government.....	37
2.4.2 Omanisation and the labour market .....	40
2.4.3 The education and training system .....	51
2.4.4 Gender in the transition context .....	59
2.4.5 The influence of socio-cultural factors.....	63
2.4.6 The role of the individual .....	70
<b>CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY .....</b>	<b>75</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	75
3.2 Research Approach and Design.....	75
3.3 Ethical considerations.....	83
3.4 Sampling .....	87
3.4.1 Focus groups .....	89
3.4.2 Self-completion questionnaires .....	91
3.5 Research instrument: focus groups.....	92
3.5.1 Developing the focus group meeting schedule .....	94
3.5.2 Focus group meetings.....	95
3.5.3 Analysis of focus group data .....	98
3.6 Research instrument: self-completion questionnaires .....	100
3.6.1 Developing the questionnaire.....	101
3.6.2 Testing/Piloting the questionnaire .....	105
3.6.3 Analysis of questionnaire data .....	106
3.6.4 Limitations of research methodology.....	107
<b>CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS.....</b>	<b>110</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	110
4.2 Perceived influence of structural factors in Oman .....	111
4.2.1 The role of government.....	111

4.2.2	The labour market .....	118
4.2.3	Education .....	128
4.2.4	Gender .....	133
4.2.5	Socio-cultural factors .....	138
4.3	The individual in the transition context.....	141
4.3.1	Motivating factors .....	141
4.3.2	Job search strategies .....	145
4.3.3	Indicators of agency .....	148
<b>CHAPTER 5</b>	<b>CONCLUSIONS.....</b>	<b>154</b>
5.1	Introduction .....	154
5.2	Aims and Objectives of this Research .....	154
5.3	Key findings from this research.....	155
5.3.1	Opportunities and constraints.....	159
5.3.2	Indicators of personal agency in transition behaviour.....	160
5.4	Limitations .....	162
5.5	Future research .....	163
5.6	Concluding thoughts .....	164
<b>REFERENCES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY</b>	<b>.....</b>	<b>165</b>
<b>APPENDIX A</b>	<b>Introductory letter .....</b>	<b>187</b>
<b>APPENDIX B</b>	<b>Focus group interview schedule .....</b>	<b>188</b>
<b>APPENDIX C</b>	<b>Focus group profiles .....</b>	<b>189</b>
<b>APPENDIX D</b>	<b>Extract from focus group transcript.....</b>	<b>191</b>
<b>APPENDIX E</b>	<b>Themes explored in focus groups and questionnaire .....</b>	<b>193</b>
<b>APPENDIX F</b>	<b>Copy of questionnaire .....</b>	<b>196</b>
<b>APPENDIX G</b>	<b>Profile of Questionnaire Respondents.....</b>	<b>203</b>
<b>APPENDIX H</b>	<b>Questionnaire Results .....</b>	<b>205</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 Post secondary enrollment (Ministry of National Economy, 2010) .....	10
Table 2 Projected Employment Figures (Ministry of National Economy, 1996) .....	42
Table 3 Examples of research on youth transitions .....	77
Table 4 Focus groups profile .....	90
Table 5 Questionnaire sample profile .....	91
Table 6 Questionnaire results for questionnaire statement D1b .....	113
Table 7 Questionnaire results for questionnaire statement D1o .....	128
Table 8 Questionnaire results for section C2 .....	142
Table 9 Questionnaire results for section C1 .....	147
Table 10 Questionnaire results for statement D1w .....	148

## LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1 Oman's population pyramid 2009 (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).....	8
Figure 2 Research overview .....	17
Figure 3 The 'yo-yo-isation' of transitions between youth and adulthood (Walther, 2006:121).....	27
Figure 4 Opportunities and constraints in the transition context in Oman .....	159

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

The start of the 'Arab Spring' in 2011 highlighted the issue of youth unemployment in the Middle East. From the initial uprisings in Tunisia, the protests spread across the region to the Gulf:

*Usually when you see the word Oman, it is preceded by the word "sleepy". It lies on the south-eastern edge of the Arabian Peninsula, and for centuries it has been valued for its strategic location at the mouth of the Strait of Hormuz, linking the Gulf to the Indian Ocean. But over the past few weeks, Oman is stirring from its slumber. In late February...there were clashes in the city of Sohar between security forces and protesters demanding more jobs. (BBC News, 20 April 2011)*

Up until this time, public protests in Oman were virtually unheard of. Youth unemployment had been identified earlier, however, as a potential driver for civil unrest in a World Bank report on the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region published in 2008. The region is experiencing a 'demographic bulge' with individuals between the ages of 15 and 29 making up 30% of the MENA region's population, comprising nearly 47% of its working-age population (Dhillon and Yousef, 2009). The ILO's Global Employment Trends in 2010 showed that the region had amongst the highest youth unemployment figures in the world (ILO, 2010). The World Bank report concluded that despite the significant investment in education, this "has not been translated into higher standards of living nor to



the economy at large” and the fact that MENA countries have some of the highest levels of public sector employment in the world has meant a “suboptimal use of labour” and “created expectations that could not be fulfilled” (2008:296). The significant growth in the participation rate of students in higher education in Oman since 1995 has led to an influx of graduate jobseekers into the labour market.

Following the 2011 protests, the Council of Ministers in Oman set up a number of special committees to explore the major employment challenges in Oman. In August 2012, the Council issued a statement which concluded that:

*...there is reluctance on the part of some youths to work in the private sector who prefer the government sector, which is one of the challenges faced by the Government...So the Council calls upon the youth to accept work in all sectors, whether governmental or private. (Oman Observer 5 August 2012).*

The message of the Council’s statement was clear: Omani youth<sup>1</sup> have a choice and the government is leaving it to them to make it. The statement also highlights what has been described as an underlying sense of “entitlement” amongst young people in the region expecting to find employment in the government sector (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010), a feature of the hypothetical Arab ‘social contract’, whereby citizens exchange their unquestioning loyalty to the state in exchange for economic security and the provision of social welfare (which public

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this research, youth is defined as between the ages of 18 - 25

sector employment is a form of) (World Bank, 2004). Although the Council's statement suggests that the onus is on young people to accept work in all sectors, one of the Omani government's response to the protests was to make 50,000 jobs available (mostly in the public sector). Here is the dichotomy: on the one hand the government is exhorting young people to exercise personal agency in job search choices and on the other it is shoring up the social support structure through the provision of public sector employment, underpinning the Arab social contract upon which young people have been seen as dependent.

Much research has been carried out in industrialised countries on education to work transition contexts such as the interplay between structural factors (such as government policies, labour market, education system, class and gender) and the role of personal agency. It has been suggested that as the transition context becomes less certain, individuals themselves will have a greater role to play in planning their own career paths and biographies (Beck, 1992). Although there is a growing amount of research on the education to work transition context in the Middle East, much has focused on the structural factors with limited focus on the perceptions of the individuals themselves. As in other regions in the world, the education to work transition context in Oman is changing. This research will provide the opportunity to explore how groups of Omani graduating students perceive the influence of structural factors in their education to work transition context and the extent to which personal agency, *"the extent that individuals feel they have the power to personally influence the world around them"* (Hitlin and Long, 2009:140), is indicated in their transition behaviour. The use of concepts such as *structured individualisation* (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006) and *bounded agency* (Evans, 2007), however, suggest that young people are making choices

in contexts which are still significantly shaped by structural factors. This research provides the first opportunity to develop an understanding of the influence of structural factors and the role of personal agency in relation to the education to work transition context in Oman. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the research context; the research objectives, a consideration of the contribution of this research; and the research outline.

## **1.1 Research context**

Any exploration of the education to work transition context in Oman needs to be considered in the light of the country's rapid development. Thanks to a significant growth in oil revenue over the last forty years, Oman, and the GCC<sup>2</sup> region as a whole, has experienced a period of tremendous economic growth. The current head of state, Sultan Qaboos bin Said Al Busaidi, came to power in 1970 and embarked on projects of nation-building and state formation often referred to in Oman as the "blessed renaissance" (Valeri, 2009). To give an idea of the challenge facing the new regime, prior to 1970 there were only three primary schools for boys, two small hospitals and 10 kilometres of surfaced road (Al Lamki, 1998). Forty years on, there were over 1250 schools offering free education up until the age of eighteen and over 60 hospitals and 150 health centres providing free health care to all Omani citizens (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

Traditionally, for young men the transition from youth to adulthood involved following their fathers into professions such as trading, agriculture or fishing.

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<sup>2</sup> Gulf Cooperation Council: includes six countries: Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, UAE, Bahrain and Oman.

Prior to the mid-70's there was no formal schooling for girls and young women would usually be married by the age of 20, leading to a life of home-based child rearing (Al Lamki, 2006). The number of active Omanis in the workforce in the Sultanate in 1970 was estimated at 100,000 of which 78,000 were in agriculture and fisheries compared to 5,500 working in the civil service (Valeri, 2009). According to government figures, in 2009 there were 160,000 Omanis working in the government sector (not including those working in defence<sup>3</sup>) and 158,315 Omanis working in private sector organisations<sup>4</sup>. In contrast, in the same year there were 874,000 expatriates employed in the private sector. Oman, like the rest of the MENA region, is also facing a significant 'demographic bulge' (see **Figure 1**) with 48% of the Omani population aged 19 and under (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

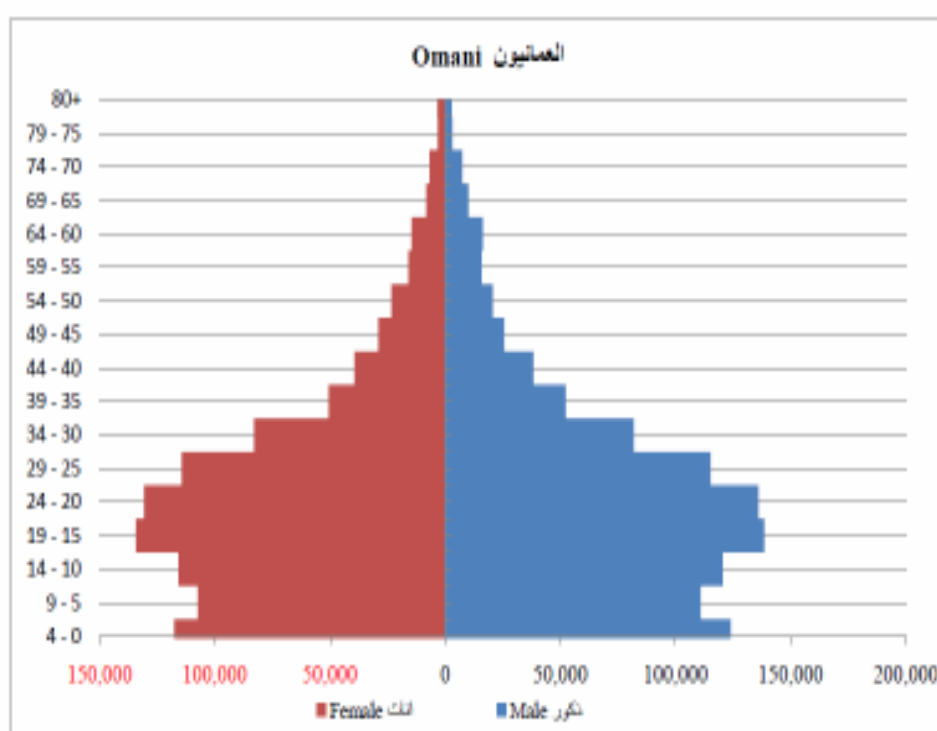


Figure 1 Oman's population pyramid 2009 (Ministry of National Economy, 2010)

<sup>3</sup> Beasant (2002) suggested that almost 25% of GDP was spent on armed services and defence in 1990s

<sup>4</sup> Only those Omanis registered with the Public Authority for Social Insurance

The economy is still largely dependent on the production of oil and gas (accounting for 80% of total revenue). One of Oman's key economic strategies is to create a national economy based on private enterprise in a competitive environment (Ministry of National Economy, 2002) with a focus on economic diversification in order to reduce oil's domination of the economy until it accounts for less than 20% of GDP. Since the 1970s, the rapid construction of an Omani infrastructure has meant dependence on an imported labour force (Harry, 2007; Al Lamki, 1998). In 1995, the Omani government launched *Vision 2020* with a focus on '*Omanisation*' - the replacement of expatriate workers with Omani nationals – aimed to underpin education, training and employment policies and promote employment of Omani nationals, particularly in the private sector.

One approach to supporting Omanisation has been to enhance the qualifications and skills of the future workforce. Like many countries in the region, Oman has invested heavily in post secondary<sup>5</sup> education over the last twenty years (Al Barwany *et al* 2009; World Bank, 2008) in order to support its human development policies embedded in the national *Vision 2020* framework. In his speech to the Council of Oman in 2001, Sultan Qaboos stated:

*...nations are built solely by the hands of citizens. Progress and prosperity can only be achieved through learning, experience, training and qualifications ... the real wealth of any nation is made up of its human resources. They are the power that achieves*

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<sup>5</sup> In this research, the term post-secondary education refers to all post school education leading to diplomas and degrees

*development in all walks of life... (Oman Daily Observer, 2002,  
cited in Valeri, 2009:204)*

As can be seen in **Table 1**, since 1996 there has been considerable growth in post secondary enrollment in Oman.

Institution	Number of students enrolled	
	1996	2008
Sultan Qaboos University	5000	15000
Teacher Training Colleges	4000	-
Colleges of Applied Sciences	-	8000
Technical Colleges	4000	21000
Vocational Colleges	2000	3000
College of Banking Studies	63	1500
Private Universities and Colleges	400	34000
Studying abroad	3000	14000
<b>Total</b>	<b>18463</b>	<b>96500</b>

**Table 1** Post secondary enrollment (Ministry of National Economy, 2010)

As the table shows, the number of students in post-secondary education increased from around 18,400 in 1996 to 96,500 in 2008 (Ministry of National Economy, 2010). The national target is aiming for at least 50% of 18-24 age group to be participating in post secondary education by the year 2020 (Al Barwany *et al*, 2009). However, the investment in human resource development has not been translated into significantly greater participation of Omani employees in the private sector workforce, with figures indicating that nearly 70% Omanis with a post secondary qualification are employed by the public sector (Ministry of National Economy, 2010).

Up until now, Oman's approach to employment, in line with other oil-rich labour markets in the region, has been described as based on a hypothetical Arab 'social contract' – a strong interventionist-redistributive orientation with a reliance on the state for economic policy development, nationalisation and provision of health and education in return for unity, loyalty and compliance (World Bank, 2004). Public sector employment is seen as the "*primary transmission mechanism of the social contract*" (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010:38). With the growth in the number of graduates entering the labour market, however, the government has been no longer able to offer jobs to all those qualified (Al Lamki, 1998). Young people have been reluctant to seek jobs in the private sector, despite the government's promotion of Omanisation policies. Al Lamki's 1998 research with undergraduates found that the majority of respondents wanted what were seen to be the better salaries, shorter working hours and higher social status attached to public sector jobs. Over a decade later, a UAE-based study suggests that the preference for public sector employment prevails in the region (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012).

The protests that took place in Oman in February 2011 suggested that there has been a shift from an environment of compliance to citizens wanting to have a greater say in their future, particularly in relation to the availability of employment opportunities for youth. Although there has been an increase in the number of studies and surveys focusing on young people's perspectives in the region (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2012; Gallup 2009; Al Lamki, 1998), no research to date has been carried out to explore the

relationship between structural factors and personal agency in the education to work transition context in Oman.

## 1.2 Research objectives

The Sultanate of Oman celebrated forty years of the “blessed renaissance” in 2010; it would therefore seem timely to explore whether the approaches taken to nation-building started in 1970 are still appropriate. As Rudd and Evans note:

*Many studies of youth transitions underestimate the degree of choice or agency evident in such processes and there have been few attempts to explain the apparent incompatibility between young people’s perceived feelings of autonomy and control and the alleged over-arching often unmediated, influence of ‘deterministic’ social structures on their lives (Rudd & Evans, 1998, p.60)*

One of the major reasons for carrying out this research was to contribute in some way to gaining an understanding of the views and perceptions of Oman’s future graduates, against the weight of literature that has focused on the structural determinants in the education to work transition context in this region (such as World Bank, 2004; Yousef, 2004; Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). As Johnston argues, one of the limitations of existing research on graduate employment is its tendency to focus on groups with the potential to influence the government, while *‘the voices of other partners in the graduate recruitment process, the graduates, are deafening in their silence’* (2003:419). Graduates are an important sector of the workforce and have been described as occupying an important place in the economy (Tomlinson, 2007). Al Lamki’s study with Omani



students provides a useful longitudinal perspective for this thesis research (Al Lamki, 1998). Her study, based on a questionnaire distributed to 168 graduating students from Sultan Qaboos University, focused on the perceived barriers to young people engaging with Omanisation in the private sector and the role of human capital theory. Her findings showed that the majority of students surveyed (over 65%) indicated a preference for work in the public sector, with compensation and benefits packages offered being the main deterrents from accepting positions in the private sector. According to her results, those students studying in the College of Commerce (on business-related programmes) had the highest percentage of respondents intending to work in the public sector (92%).

This current research, carried out fifteen years after Al Lamki's, offers a further exploration of student perceptions with a focus on the influence of structural factors and the role of personal agency. While Al Lamki's respondents were all studying at Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), the participants for this research include Omanis studying in private sector higher education institutions based in Muscat as well as those studying on business-related programmes at SQU. The research was carried out in two stages: the objective of the first stage of the research was to explore key themes identified by graduating students as being pertinent to their education to work transition context and their perceptions of opportunities and constraints. This exploration was carried with four focus groups, two groups comprising final year students at SQU and two groups comprising students from a private university college. The second stage involved the development and distribution of a self-completion questionnaire amongst SQU students and students from four private colleges. The quantitative research

instrument served two purposes: one of triangulation (in order to explore the extent to which the views expressed by the participants in the focus groups were widely held) and complementarity (providing an opportunity to explore indicators of individual agency and other motivating factors not explored in the focus groups). The research methodology and approach are discussed in Chapter 3.

The principal questions driving this research were:

- How do graduating students see structural factors (government policies, education, labour market, socio-cultural factors) influencing their education to work transition context? To what extent do students perceive these to be opportunities and/or constraints?
- What are the key motivating factors in seeking employment?
- Is there any indication of personal agency in the transition behaviour of these students?

The sub aims of this research were:

- Is there a notable difference in the perceptions of students in relation to (a) their gender or (b) whether they are studying in a publicly-funded or self-paying institution?
- Has there been a change in the expectations and perceptions of graduates since Al Lamki's research in terms of their willingness to engage with the government's Omanisation policies?

### **1.3 Contribution of the research**

It has been suggested that in industrialised countries a fundamental shift has taken place in the relationship between the individual and society, underwritten

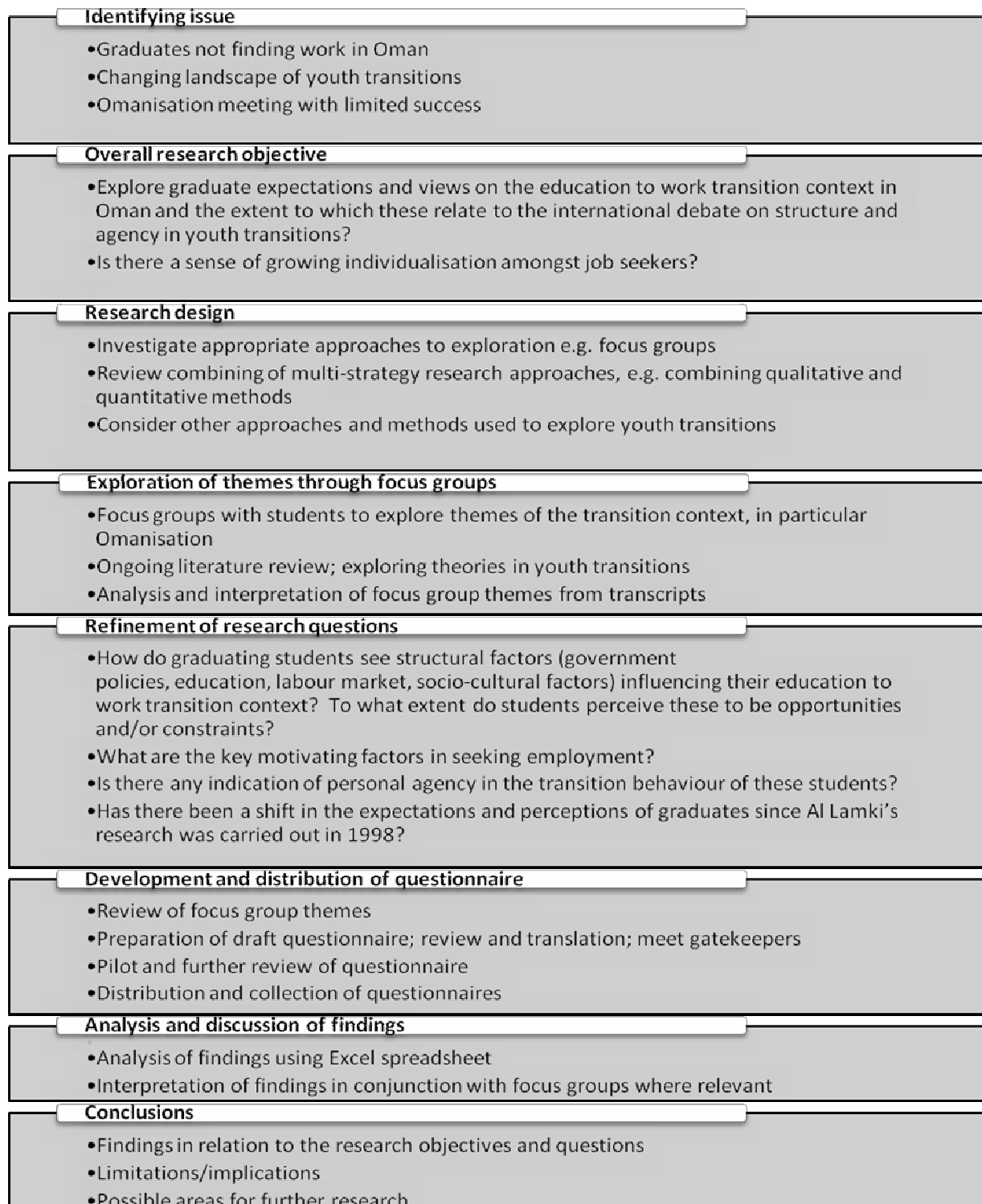
by new economic and technological processes (Kehily, 2007). This underlying process of individualisation manifests itself in very different ways depending on the context. There has been a range of research carried out on education to work transition contexts (see Table 3 in section 3.1) including a focus on the interplay between structure and agency and how young people view opportunities and constraints (e.g. Woolley, 2009; Walther *et al*, 2005; Furlong *et al*, 2003; Evans *et al*, 2001; Rudd and Evans, 1998).

Over the last decade, there has been a surge of interest in the employment context in the Gulf region, in part in response to an interest in the convergence and divergence of human resource practices internationally (Al Dosary and Rahman, 2005; Al Lamki, 2005; Ali, 2007; Aycan *et al*, 2007; Harry, 2007; Rees, 2007; Al Barwany and Chapman, 2009; Mashood *et al*, 2009; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Most of this research has been focused on workplace practices, particularly localisation policies, and considered from the viewpoint of employer/employee. While youth unemployment has been identified as a key issue in the region, particularly in light of the growing demographic bulge (UNDP, 2009; Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008; World Bank, 2004), little academic research has been carried out to capture young people's perspectives. The study of graduates entering the labour market in Oman provides an opportunity to consider whether theories relating to youth transitions developed in industrialised and countries are useful for studying the transition context in a developing country which is itself in transition: "*metaphors of transitions should be dynamic concepts which are capable of informing our knowledge of new or unfamiliar circumstances*" (Furlong 2009:344).

Findings from this research will hopefully provide some indication of what motivates graduate jobseekers; their perceptions on the influence of structural factors in terms of supporting opportunities or act as constraints; and the extent to which young people themselves are exercising personal agency in their transition behaviour in this context. As this will also provide a longitudinal perspective on the results of Al Lamki's study in order to see if there has been a shift in student aspirations as they enter the workforce, this research may also be relevant to other countries in the region that have an increasing number of graduates entering the workforce and have adopted localisation policies, such as Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain and Kuwait.

## 1.4 Research overview

The overview of the journey that this research has taken is provided in **Figure 2** below:



**Figure 2** Research overview

This chapter has provided an introduction to this research; its context; and the research objectives and questions. It has also outlined what contribution to an understanding of students in their education to work transition context this research aims to make. Chapter two provides a consideration of the literature in the areas of theoretical approaches to studying youth transitions, including historical perspectives; structure and agency; opportunity structures and generational theory. The chapter also provides an overview of the literature on structural factors such as the role of government, education, the labour market, gender and socio-cultural factors, and the role of the individual in the Middle East and in particular Oman. Chapter three presents the research approach and design; ethical considerations; the approach to sampling; and a consideration of the research instruments, focus groups and self-completion questionnaires. Chapter four considers the findings and analysis of this research and chapter five considers the significant findings from this study, overall conclusions and suggestions for further research. Limitations of the research are included in chapter five.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter will firstly consider the study of youth as a life stage; theoretical approaches to the study of youth transitions, including historical perspectives; and an exploration of the literature in relation to structural factors and agency relevant to the focus of this research. As there has been a limited amount of research on youth transitions in Oman, literature on the youth transition context in the Middle East provides some relevant reference points for the objectives of this research. This part of the chapter has been divided into sections focusing on a number of different structural factors: the role of government; Omanisation and the labour market; the education system; gender and the influence of socio-cultural factors. The role of the individual and motivation are the focus of the last section.

### **2.2 The study of youth as a life stage**

How youth is perceived and conceptualized in policy-making processes can have a significant impact on youth transitions and shape the opportunities that are available (France, 2007). It also has implications for the degree to which young people are seen to be dependent, semi-independent and dependent. Youth in western societies commonly refers to the life stage between childhood and adulthood, distinguishing between the periods of dependence and independence (Kehily, 2007). Youth has been seen as sociologically significant because how young people experience their transition to adulthood can influence later

behaviour and attitudes, be it as a family member, in the workplace, or as a member of society.

American sociologists have suggested that youth transitions are not only a passage from education to work but a socially constructed life stage, where the period of youth is extended through a longer dependence on familial networks, coined in the concept of 'emerging adulthood' (Tanner and Arnett, 2009). Emerging adulthood is seen as a distinct period of development between youth and adulthood, around the ages of 18-25, with commitments usually associated with adulthood postponed. Three principal factors of emerging adulthood have been identified. The first is an extended period of post secondary education in order to prepare for a knowledge based economy; the second recognises that more opportunities for women mean delay in child-rearing; and the third highlights that greater tolerance of pre-marital sex leads to a postponement in marriage (Tanner and Arnett, 2009). The concept of a transformation in the concept "adulthood" is also suggested by Stokes and Wyn (2007), who identify the multi-dimensional aspect of the journey from youth to becoming an adult.

While there is a lack of agreement as to whether emerging adulthood is a distinct phase or not (Côté and Bynner, 2008), there is a widespread consensus internationally that young people's transitions to adulthood now take longer (Roberts, 2009; Côté & Bynner, 2008; Pollock, 2008; Raffe, 2008; Evans, 2007; Molgat, 2007; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Wyn and Woodman, 2006; Walther et al, 2005). This delay to adulthood has repercussions for society as a whole:



*“To have a job means adult status, self-respect, money, independence and the opportunity to broaden one’s social contacts.*

*Young people who are cut off from work are losing a vital chance to get new perspectives and to integrate into wider society”*

*(Commission of the European Communities, 2001:38)*

In the Middle East, being an adult is defined by work, citizenship, marriage and the establishment of independent households (Silver, 2007). The overall transition from youth to adulthood is punctuated by a number of different transitions: school to work; school to university; university to employment; employment to marriage; and marriage to parenthood, with local norms and values influencing all of these stages. Dhillon and Yousef (2009) suggest that the challenges currently facing youth in the Middle East, such as unemployment, did not exist a generation ago. Previous generations faced what is termed a ‘traditional’ life course reflected in most rural societies where the transition to adulthood was mediated by family and the community. The growth of the role in state institutions in the Middle East from the 1950s to the 1980s led to the welfare dependent life course with the government providing education, employment and protection for citizens. Young people born since the beginning of the 1980s are being faced with a labour market shifting from being state run to a greater focus on responding to market forces. Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon (2008) have coined the term ‘*waithood*’ to describe the period between when a young person gains a qualification and when they find employment, which could take years in some cases. This *waithood* has a direct impact on when young people get married, start a family and take on responsibilities. Delayed or

extended transition to adulthood has negative repercussions in terms of integration into mainstream society. Few countries in the region have formal financial support mechanisms for unemployed youth and a period of *waitthood* is usually supported by their families. Comparative studies of national transitions found that in countries with strong family networks, such as in southern Europe, young people were able to prolong their job search as they could rely on family support (Côté and Bynner, 2008; Raffe, 2008).

## **2.3 Theoretical approaches to studying youth transitions**

### **2.3.1 Historical perspectives in youth transition literature**

Stokes and Wyn (2007) suggest that the concept of transition is “found wanting” as a means for understanding young people’s experience of education and work as it conflates social and developmental processes (blurring the boundaries between youth-adult and student-worker). The assumption of linear movement from education to work which underpins the metaphor of transition “masks the reality of more complex and often chaotic processes in young people’s lives” (Stokes and Wyn, 2007:498). However, bearing this in mind, the concept of transition has been a widely used heuristic to explore and compare young people’s experiences (Morrow, 2012).

Raffe defines a transition system as “the relatively enduring features of a country’s institutional and structural arrangements which shape transition processes and outcomes” (2008:278). Research on youth transitions, in particular the education to work transition, has frequently focused on how young people experience the transition process and the career paths that they adopt.

The development of different transition systems around the world suggests that these may be less affected by the impact of convergence through globalisation; the analysis of transition systems also provides further opportunities to explore the “holistic interrelationships among different social and economic institutions” (Raffe, 2008:278).

Following the Second World War, youth became a major focus for government policy intervention in the UK with an aim to tackle problems and barriers that young people faced (France, 2007). Youth transition studies during the 1960s and 1970s in the UK considered the concept of opportunity structures (Roberts, 1968) and routes that young people typically took into employment (Ashton and Field, 1976). These studies explored the extent to which the choices that young people made were influenced by what was available in their immediate environment and the extent to which their employment destinations were associated with their schooling and social background (Pollock, 2008). Youth transitions at this stage could be seen as a period of ‘socialisation’, where main institutions of society, especially school and family, prepared young people for their adult roles (Rudd, 1997). A young person was seen as passive and manipulable with transitions focusing on social conformity, social expectations and social control. Roberts concluded that:

*Apart from a privileged minority of the population individuals are (more or less) constrained in their choice of occupations by social variables that are outside their control e.g. gender, ethnicity and social class (Roberts 1968:182).*

The three-way classification of typical school to work transition routes during this period were: 'academic', whereby young people entered post-secondary education and exited with a qualification which enabled them to enter a non-manual job with a clear career path; 'vocational' where school leavers undertook an apprenticeship or a vocational qualification and then enter a skilled job; and a 'residual' route where unqualified young people entered low skilled jobs or experienced periods of unemployment. These distinct routes were taken as a consequence of choices within the limitations of what was on offer at the time of their passage, such as the state of the economy and the education system (Pollock, 2008). The pursuit of these traditional pathways has been seen as young people 'filling the niches' (Evans and Furlong, 1997). The period of youth transitions in the UK pre 1970s has been perceived by youth researchers as the 'golden age' in which youth transitions seemed single step, straightforward and linear. However, further research on studies of youth transitions in 1960's (Goodwin and O'Connor, 2005; Vickerstaff, 2003) have suggested that "*the absence of apparent choice might be hypothesized to have brought its own risks and dilemmas*" (Vickerstaff, 2003:270).

With the rise in youth unemployment, youth transitions were seen as more complex in the 1970s and 1980s with the idea that school leavers could follow different 'trajectories'. Metaphors such as 'pathways' and 'trajectories' reflected the view that workplace destinations were, to a large extent, outside an individual's control and created through structural influences (Furlong, 2009; Raffe, 2003; Rudd, 1997). In the 1990s, major structural changes in labour

markets and opportunities constructed new forms of employment and training routes (Raffe, 2003). In the UK, examples of these included a stagnant youth labour market with limited opportunities for young people leaving school to enter paid employment; an expansion in post-16 education in further and higher education institutions; and an expansion in the provision of state-funded vocational training and a greater skills development focus (France, 2007). The youth transition context in this period provided an environment to explore the extent to which the concept of 'individualisation' (Beck, 1992) could be used to describe the situations in which young people found themselves. As life became more uncertain, individuals were having to create their own 'biographies', involving planning and 'navigating' their own career and lifestyle direction. The metaphor of 'navigation' reflected a shift from structural determinism to a greater involvement of young people themselves in making decisions (Rudd and Evans, 1998) and a greater focus on individual agency (factors such as judgement, resilience and life management skills). According to Roberts:

*A crude measure of individualisation is the proportion of age peers in a person's social network with whom he or she shares a common biography having grown up in the same district, attended the same schools, and entered similar types of employment at the same ages (Roberts, 1995:113)*

Individualism has been linked to the disembedding of tradition and structure and the emergence of the age of uncertainty (Beck and Beck-Gernsheim, 2002 cited in France, 2007). Within the individualised society, the individual learns "to

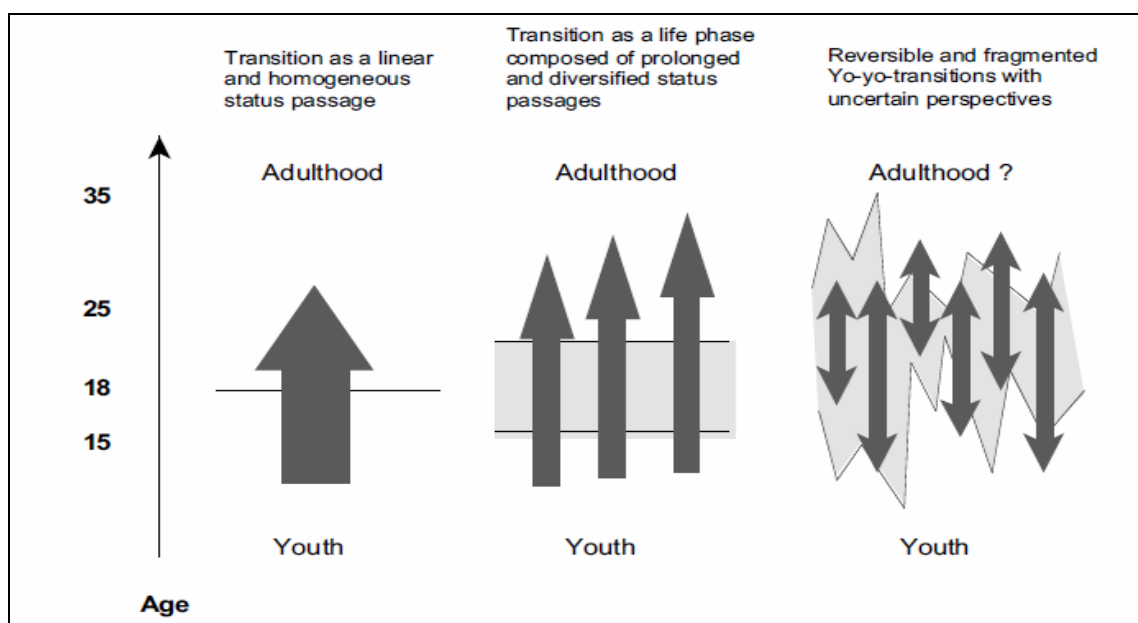
*conceive of himself or herself as the centre of action, as the planning office with respect to his/her own biography*" (Rudd and Evans, 1998:40). Individualisation could be an active or passive process with behaviours influenced by institutional structures, labour market conditions and the operation of social networks (Evans and Heinz, 1993). As young people 'navigate' their way through the choices and pathways provided, they have to actively negotiate risk and uncertainty. It has been argued that the notion of individualisation and its impact on career-related choices only makes sense when coupled with an understanding of the structural barriers, as not all young people are able to make the same choices. Otherwise, individualisation could be taken to imply that young people are in control of their own destinies and have no one but themselves to blame if the outcomes are not successful (Pollock, 2008). Structural factors still remain influential:

*Young people can struggle to establish adult identities and maintain coherent biographies, they may develop strategies to overcome various obstacles, but their life chances remain highly structured, with social class and gender being critical to an understanding of experiences in a range of life contexts (Furlong and Cartmel, 2006:138)*

Furlong and Cartmel (2006) pointed out that the individualisation thesis placed too much emphasis on young people's agency when in fact their choices were always dependent on what was available and the resources available to them - the epistemological fallacy – as the notions of agency are firmly linked to constraining structural influences. While there may be more choices, the

opportunities themselves may be more limited. This relationship between individual choice and the structural factors limited was termed 'structured individualisation'.

More recent trends in the education to work transition context has given rise to metaphors of 'churning' or 'job shopping' (Gangl, 2003), used to reflect the greater mobility of new entrants to a career path through a process of churn from one job to another, between different forms of insecure employment (Worth, 2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006). The increase in the number of part-time jobs and flexible working practices could be seen either as stepping stones or as a hazard to gaining more secure long-term work. Walther (2006) suggests that as youth transitions have become de-standardised, they have become characterized by their reversibility as opposed to their linearity, giving rise to the term 'yo-yo' transitions (see Figure 3).



**Figure 3** The 'yo-yo-isation' of transitions between youth and adulthood (Walther, 2006:121)

The different metaphors used describe both the structural limitations within which young people find themselves as well as the possibilities for making choices which will influence the direction of their transition. A young person's transition behaviour - "*patterns of activity people adopt in attempting to realise their personal interests and occupational goals within social requirements and structural opportunities*" (Evans, 2007:86) – is influenced by the social context and their own active individualisation (Heinz, 2009). Research based on the transitions of different cohorts of students in UK and Germany (Evans and Heinz, 1993) identified a typology of transition behaviours: *strategic; step by step; taking chances; and wait and see*. 'Step by step' transitions were associated with the fluid character of local opportunities; more institutionalised pathways promoted more 'strategic transition' behaviour. In circumstances where young people focused on the short-term horizon, 'wait and see' and 'taking chances' were more common.

The historical context in which youth transitions take place has been viewed as an important backdrop for exploring the differences from one generation to another as opposed to focusing on youth as a life stage within a transitions paradigm (Wyn and Woodman, 2006). This generational approach is seen as one

*...in which transitions are conceived to be shaped by the time of birth, circumstances and experiences to which each new generation in each country is exposed (Côté and Bynner, 2008:256).*



Research in this area has looked at the broader context of cohort studies to compare one generation to another in terms of schooling and variants in youth transitions. Differences clearly exist between cohorts: currently young people in the industrialised world have to face challenges that earlier cohorts did not have to face, such as increased competition to find employment as older workers stay in the workplace longer (Tomlinson, 2006). Large scale biographical approaches can be used as a way of understanding how individuals make sense of their lives within the dynamic process of transition, embedded in a set of circumstances that they may be unable to control or influence. The generational approach can be used to explore the transition experience of a whole cohort, and the impact of distinct events such as an economic downturn or employment scarcity on young people's subsequent lives (Pollock, 2008). While the generational approach provides a historical context for youth transitions, Roberts (2009) argues that it is the structural determinants of 'opportunity structures' in local labour markets which explain the variation in youth transitions. Opportunity structures are primarily formed by the inter-relationships between family origins, education, labour market processes and employers' recruitment practices, along with ethnicity, location and gender. Members of privileged groups (such as males, whites, and individuals with monetary resources) have more structural opportunities to shape their lives and direct their actions; agency is therefore exercised within socially structured opportunities (Hitlin and Elder, 2007).

### 2.3.2 Structural factors and agency in youth transitions

Walther (2006) suggests that investigating variations in the interplay between structural factors and agency is important to gain an understanding of how young

people manage their 'individual subjectivities'. The transitions of young people from education to work have been seen to be influenced and shaped by what is considered to be outside an individual's control (structural factors) and the actions and choices of the individual themselves (agency):

*Structural factors, as mediated by the family and local opportunity structures, continue to have a commanding place in the shaping of youth transitions (Côté & Bynner, 2008:255)*

While *structure* has been described as both the medium and outcome of human interaction, capabilities of individuals are ultimately bound by their structural contexts (Giddens, 1984). Structural factors, however, are not necessarily a source of constraint; they can also be seen as resources, providing sources of power and control. In the context of youth transitions, structural factors have been described as "*inputs from organisations at a national and local level; the effects of labour markets, and influences of broad social characteristics such gender, class and ethnicity*" (Rudd and Evans, 1998, p.39). Highly structured environments are associated with the idea of limited scope for individual, proactive effort (i.e. agency) and provide opportunities for those following clearly defined routes (Evans, 2007). Walther (2006) suggests that transitions between youth and adulthood are structured by a complex system of institutional arrangements and socio-economic structures. His analysis of different transition contexts in Europe shows that existing structural factors emerge from past decisions and developments. A typology of transition regimes (universalistic; employment-centred; liberal and sub-protective) suggests that young people's

job seeking orientations and strategies will be embedded in systems of opportunities and constraints offering varying degrees of support. Raffe (2008) states that six key ingredients of successful transition systems are a healthy economy; well-organised pathways that connect initial education with work and further study; opportunities for workplace experience to be combined with education; safety nets for those at risk; good information and guidance; and effective institutions and processes. Highlighting these factors “*draw[s] attention to the processes by which institutional dimensions have their effects*” (2008:291).

The transition context is the “*ongoing interactions between person and environment which result in a unique life path or biography that is patterned after societal templates but retains the mark of the individual*” (Crockett, 2002:2). Young people come to these transitional encounters with their own resources, beliefs, premises, intentions, fears, hopes and individual characteristics which can influence the way a person processes experiences and interacts with the environment. Personal goals cannot be context free as aspirations can be beyond the level of the individual and are the result of a combination of opportunities and constraints:

*...individuals construct their own life course through the choices and actions they take within the opportunities and constraints of history and social circumstances (Elder 1998 cited in Crockett 2002 p.9)*

Individuals constructing their own life course brings us to the notion of agency. Agency in its broadest sense is *“something that causes something else...an environment is assumed, but it is the individual’s perception of and response to that environment that is considered central rather than the environment per se”* (Crockett, 2002:2). For Giddens, *“agency refers not to the intentions people have in doing things but to their capability of doing those things in the first place”* (1984:9). Woolley highlights an individual’s control in her definition of agency:

*...the scope that people feel they have to shape their own lives, or in other words one’s sense of control...signaled by confidence, independence and proactivity (2009:10)*

Hitlin and Long (2009), who explored youth transitions in the context of life course studies, present agency as an individual-level construct fundamental for social action; agency is *“an umbrella term for retrospective analysis of decisions made at turning points and transitions”* (2009:138).

Evans (2007) defines agency as *“a process in which past habits and routines are contextualized and future possibilities are envisaged in the contingencies of the present moment”* (p.85). This is based on the idea of agency as a temporally embedded concept, proposed by Emirbayer and Hirsch:

*Theoretically, our central contribution is to begin to reconceptualize human agency as a temporally embedded process of social engagement, informed by the past (in its habitual aspect), but also*

*oriented toward the future (as a capacity to imagine alternative possibilities) and toward the present (as a capacity to contextualize past habits and future projects within the contingencies of the moment) (1999:963)*

In Evans' view, this particular concept of agency supports empirical research because it presented agency as a time-based phenomenon. Research carried out by Evans *et al* (2001) in the UK and Germany focused on young people's degrees of control over their career destinies in contrast to the importance and relevant influence of national and regional contexts (such as local labour markets, gender and class). The research found that the timing of transition is dependent on the available jobs and cultural norms which influence the decisions of young people. Although respondents in former East Germany were found to demonstrate greater personal agency in response to the more open conditions created by social and economic transformations, Evans also found that more opportunities for all can lead to individuals blaming themselves for their failures rather than structural factors:

*Highly structured environments are associated in people's minds with the idea of reduced scope for individual, proactive effort. In highly structured environments, opportunities are open only for those following clearly defined routes. Consequently, it is those same structural barriers that are held responsible by individuals for any failure (Evans, 2007:90)*

The increasing role of personal agency in youth transitions has not necessarily replaced traditional forms of socialisation but is seen as introducing more risk and uncertainty into youth transitions. Evans (2007) used the term “bounded agency” to describe how macro forces shape and constrain an individual’s ability to exert influence over their own lives:

*...bounded agency is socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference as well as external actions (p.92)*

For Evans (2007) bounded agency focuses on individuals as people with agentic beliefs about work and their social environment and how they respond to frustrations within the transition context. Hitlin and Long (2009) also recognise agency as a ‘bounded phenomenon’ and they highlight two dimensions for understanding human agency: agency is “*the extent that individuals feel they have the power to personally influence the world around them*” (p.140) but there is a difference between a person’s objective opportunities to exert control or influence over their life (structural agency) and their subjective belief about their personal capacity to exert influence (individual agency). Concepts of agency may also be shaped by cultural beliefs; there may be culturally-shaped expectations for the amount of agency an individual may exert on their own lives at different points in the transition context. There are therefore three variables: “*an individual’s sense of agentic capacity; their structural opportunities to exercise that capacity and cultural beliefs about the relationship of the two*” (Hitlin and Long, 2009:140).

What is the relationship between agency and transition behaviour? Bandura (2008) identified four core properties of human agency: *intentionality*, developing action plans and strategies to realise intentions; *forethought*, goal setting and anticipation of likely outcomes; *self-reactiveness*, the ability to monitor and regulate progress; and *self-reflexivity*, an ability to reflect and learn from experience. Planning and decision-making are important for young people intending to shape individualised transitions; ‘planful competence’ is needed in order to select between alternative pathways that match aspirations and skills (Heinz, 2009). Agency supports the attainment of life goals, an ‘*active process of choosing the appropriate institutional involvements, organisational memberships, and interpersonal relationships*’ (Shanahan, 2000:675). Hitlin and Elder (2007) propose two aspects of ‘life course agency’: exercising of action with long-term implications and the self-reflexive belief about one’s capacity to achieve biographical goals. *Self-efficacy* is another one of the central defining elements of personal agency (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; Yorke and Knight, 2007; Woolley, 2005; Crockett, 2002): “*the confidence that one can, on balance, ‘make a difference’ in situations through persistence and strategic thinking*” (Yorke and Knight, 2007:160). How to measure these different aspects of personal agency is key to understanding the extent to which agency plays a role in young people’s transition contexts (developing indicators of agency is discussed in section 3.2).

## **2.4 Youth transitions in Oman and the Middle East**

The previous sections have provided insight into the key concepts and models developed to explore and investigate youth transitions in industrialised contexts.

Evans and Furlong (1997) and Raffe (2008) agree that transitions need to be considered in the broader context:

*The context within which young people make decisions about future educational participation consists of more than a labour market situation: it also involved sets of communal relationships within which young people develop assumptive worlds and contemplate future events (Evans and Furlong, 1997:30)*

*The institutional and structural factors which shape transitions are broader than education and training; they include the organisation of labour markets as well as contextual features such as social welfare systems and family structures (Raffe, 2008:277)*

The main focus of this research is an exploration of structural factors and agency within the Omani education to work transition context. While there is only a limited amount of literature available on Oman, research from the broader Middle East region provides a useful benchmark as there is commonality across many features of the youth transition landscape. Political, economical and socio-cultural factors will have an impact on the available opportunities and constraints. Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon (2008) propose that transitions from youth to adulthood in the Middle East have stalled. The substantial investment in education in the region over the last twenty years has not been reflected in more young people securing jobs and there has been an acceleration of problems in relation to the social exclusion of young people in the Middle East (World Bank,



2008). This section will consider relevant literature with regard to various structural factors – government, labour market, education system, gender and socio-cultural factors – that may have an influence on youth transitions as well as the role of the individual in the transition context.

#### 2.4.1 The role of government

One of the key structural factors that has had an impact on the education to work context in the Middle East region and in Oman is the role of the government, both in terms of the type of government model in place and government policies and their implementation. Oman is an example of Arabian Gulf state-society relations which have been described as the ‘rentier’ model of government (Hertog, 2010; Nonneman and Youngs, 2010; Rabi, 2002). The rentier state derives most of its income from government-owned resources such as oil. This natural resource provides the state with a high level of financial independence and with less dependence, compared to economies in the West, on revenues from the population. In return, the rulers distribute the wealth to the citizens through health, education and security, described as the ‘interventionist-redistributive model’ (Yousef, 2004). The power is held by elites and the approach to controlling civil society is top-down. The relationship between the government and its citizens has been termed the ‘Arab social contract’ as citizens pledge their loyalty in exchange for generous social benefits and security (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; World Bank, 2004).

There has been a call (predominantly from the West) for a revision of the Arab region’s social contract (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; UNDP, 2009; ILO, 2004; World Bank 2004; Yousef, 2004) as it is seen as unsustainable with the

growth in population and the limited oil income in the future. There are also pressures from globalisation, with mature industrialised countries looking for openings and investment opportunities in emerging countries. Within these critiques of the Arab social contract, lays a distrust of state authoritarianism and a call for greater democratisation. From the World Bank's viewpoint a new social contract will have long-term benefits for MENA, creating "*mechanisms for supporting workers as they respond to changes in the structure of employment associated with privatization... with different skill requirements*" (World Bank, 2004:13). A new social contract would mean a recalibration of the relationship between the state and the citizen; moving from state reliance to greater individual self-reliance. As Edwards and Karau point out, however, the social contract has been defined in a number of different ways, suggesting that "*different social contracts exist that can dictate appropriate behavior in different societal contexts...Behavior that is considered appropriate according to one social contract may be considered inappropriate under another*" (2007:68).

Evans (2007) explored the implications of a changing transition context which included subjects in former East Germany (2007) and found that the more open conditions created by social and economic transformations encouraged greater personal agency amongst young people. However, structural factors, such as a more competitive labour market for these individuals also had a role to play in shaping these transitions. Although a Gulf rentier state is not the same as a former Communist one, there is a parallel to be found in the shift from an individual's dependence on the government (such as in the provision of public sector employment) to a transition environment with a greater onus on the

individual. Rudd and Evans (1998) noted that the formation of individualistic identities challenged the status quo of collective identity, a feature of Arab societies. Within more rigid social structures, young people are less likely to exercise agency.

There are opportunities for political participation in Oman, although these are limited; the current Sultan rules by decree but has two advisory councils, *Majlis Al Dawla* and *Majlis A'Shura*, of which the latter has a publicly elected membership (all Omanis over the age of 21 are entitled to vote). Oman has been described as walking:

*...a tight line between the sultanic tradition of paternalism – centred on the absolute monarch – and internal pressures for greater participation in decision making...[what has taken place] is the emergence of a quite distinctive political culture, assimilating elements of what is new and what is old into a mix quite unlike that found elsewhere. (Rabi, 2002:49)*

These 'internal pressures' came to the fore during the protests of 2011 in Oman. In response, the Omani Cabinet of Ministers was shuffled; the minimum wage was raised and greater legislative powers were given to the *Majlis A'Shura*. While the principle of consultation is seen as the primary mechanism for citizens to influence political decisions, young citizens in Oman have now witnessed the impact of demonstrations and protests, a foretaste of the changing context in which their education to work transitions are taking place.

In terms of the typologies of youth transition regimes, as suggested by Walther (2006), in some ways Oman's transition regime closely resembles the 'sub-protective' regimes found in southern European countries, with high rates of youth unemployment, especially among young women; weak vocational training routes; a significant role for higher education and public sector employment in order to provide youth with a "regularly institutionalised status". Walther argues that one of the features of this regime is a long waiting phase, dependent on the extent of family support; much like the concept of 'waithood' identified in the Middle East transition context (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). However, unlike southern Europe, Oman has little in the way of informal labour market as low paid or temporary employment is taken up by an expatriate workforce.

#### 2.4.2 Omanisation and the labour market

One of the features of Oman's changing education to work transition context is the government's Omanisation policy. The significant demographic bulge with 48% of the Omani population aged 19 and under (Ministry of National Economy, 2010) means a growing population entering the workforce and a saturated public sector. Oman, like other GCC countries, has embarked on a localisation programme in order to stimulate the employment of nationals in the private sector as part of plans to support economic growth which is less dependent on oil (Ministry of National Economy, 2002). The term "localisation" has been used to describe national employment and training policies to replace migrant or imported labour with local (or national) labour (Al Dosary and Rahman, 2005; Bhanugopan and Fish, 2007; Harry, 2007; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Other authors have used the term "indigenisation" (Al Lamki, 2000) and

“nationalisation” (Ruppert, 1999; Rees et al, 2007; Mashood et al, 2009; Omair, 2010). The different terms used to describe the policy of localisation in the different GCC states attest to its centrality of the nationalism underpinning it, with all of the terms in Arabic adding a suffix to the name of the country, i.e. *Kiwata* (Kuwait), *Amnana* or *Omanisation* (Oman), *Saáwada* (Saudi Arabia), *Qatrana* (Qatar), and *Emrata* (UAE) (El Hussein and El Shahin, 2008). Valeri (2009) suggests that *Omanisation* is more than a socio-economic policy: it is a means to establish a national identity, promote national solidarity and is intended to unite a historically divided tribal society.

Although since the 1970s expatriates have had a key role in the building of Oman’s infrastructure, literature suggests that an expatriate workforce has a number of negative impacts: economic, as the majority foreign workers send remittances abroad (Harry, 2007); social, with potential tensions because of different cultural and religious practices between local and foreign workers; psychological (for the expatriate employees), due to the nature of temporary work; and political, with national employees resenting the presence of a white collar expatriate workforce whose pay and conditions are considerably better (Al Dosary and Rahman, 2005). The problem of a large expatriate population has been described as an “indisputable threat to the social and political stability of the Arab Gulf Cooperation Council countries” (Mellahi and Al-Hinai, 2000:178). Despite these drawbacks, in many GCC countries, including Oman, the number of expatriates joining the workforce has continued to grow.

In 1995, Oman's national framework for economic and human resource development *Vision 2020* was launched, with Omanisation as a driving force. *Vision 2020* projected the following public sector and private sector employment figures for Omani nationals:

National Labour	1993		2020	
	No.	%	No.	%
Public sector	175,000	73%	270,000	30%
Private sector	65,000	27%	662,000	70%
<b>Total</b>	240,000	100%	892,000	100%

**Table 2** Projected Employment Figures (Ministry of National Economy, 1996)

In order to support the implementation of Omanisation, the government introduced a number of interventionist policies such as setting quotas for private companies regarding the percentage of Omanis to be employed; designation by the Ministry of Manpower of certain jobs for Omani citizens only (ranging from delivery drivers to librarians); restricting work visas for non-Omanis; and levying fines on companies for non compliance (Al Lamki, 2000). Priority for recruiting Omanis is also written into the Omani Labour Law (article 11). The original targets (see **Table 2**) would now seem to reflect considerable optimism. Government figures showed that in 2009 there were 874,245 expatriates (an increase of 11% on the previous year) making up 86% of the workforce in the private sector. In the same year, there were 159,538 Omanis working for the civil service and other government departments (not including the figures of those working in the Ministry of Defence) compared to 136,622 Omanis working in the

private sector<sup>6</sup>, 63% under the age of 30 (Ministry of National Economy, 2010). However, around 67% of the total number of Omanis in the private sector are earning 200 OMR (around £300) or less, which suggests that the majority of Omanis being attracted to the private sector are prepared to work for the minimum wage, suggesting that these positions attract Omanis with limited qualifications or skills.

What are the challenges facing Omanisation and the implications for the transition context? According to Al Lamki's research (1998), labour market segmentation between the public and private sector in terms of working conditions, salaries and benefits was shown to have a negative impact on the willingness of graduates to work in the private sector. Research on youth employment in the Gulf region has suggested that a large number of graduates, unable to find work in the public sector, prefer to be unemployed than take a position in the private sector which by many is seen to have a lower social status (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008). Oil income in the region supports a high reservation wage - the wage at which an individual is indifferent between working and not working – which is strengthened further through robust family support. Youth are able to live with parents while waiting for employment and are financially supported by their families. Oman has also recently introduced a job seeker's allowance of 150 OMR (about £220) a month for the registered unemployed for a six-month period. Regional research suggests that youth who have invested time and energy in obtaining a higher education qualification would

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<sup>6</sup> This figure is based on the number of Omanis registered by private sector employers with the Public Authority for Social Insurance; this does not include casual workers or self-employed Omanis (Ministry of National Economy, 2010)

be unwilling to accept menial jobs after graduation (Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008).

Another challenge is that the introduction of quota systems has a potentially negative impact on a country's efforts to project a business-friendly persona for external investment; forcing businesses in the private sector to hire nationals is seen to make them less competitive despite potentially alleviating unemployment (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; World Bank 2008). Restrictive employment practices such as a lack of flexibility in hiring and firing policies has meant that some private sector employers have been reluctant to recruit Omanis (Fasan and Iqbal, 2003). The significant number of Omanis on the minimum wage indicates some statistical support for the notion that some Omanis are being recruited as an act of 'tokenism'; there is anecdotal evidence to suggest that employers are 'fiddling' Omanisation rates as some young Omanis are taken on but actually being paid to stay at home (Valeri, 2009; Guardian Weekly, 2008). Evidence has also been presented to show that organisations are job doubling i.e. employing an expatriate to do the work alongside an Omani in order to meet government quotas (El Hussein and Elshahin, 2008).

One of the reasons cited for a lack of success in Omanisation is that private sector employers in the region, particularly in small and medium-size enterprises, are constrained by the difficulties with dismissing non-performing national employees (World Bank, 2008). Omanisation may be in conflict with the HR practices of overseas organisations working in Oman as the quota system, rather than competence of candidates, may influence the selection and recruitment



process. The “rights” of individuals may prevent private sector employers from recruiting Gulf nationals as organisations feel unable to deal with underperforming local staff within a national quota system (Fassan and Iqbal, 2003; Harry, 2007). Rigid markets lower staff turnover and prevent young workers from competing with existing workers for jobs, limiting opportunities for work experience and reducing incentives to improve skills while waiting. The exploration of issues relating to the implementation of localisation policies, suggests that the private sector has, to some extent, become an extension of the public sector with protectionist policies for hiring and firing.

Omanisation would seem to be at odds with increasing employers’ demands for local skills (Al Lamki, 2000; Harry, 2007; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Valeri cites the example of an employer running a catering company for the oil industry: “I prefer paying an Omani employee and ask him to stay at home, and keep the Indian guy working” (2005:7). In much of the literature, Omani workers are seen as having inadequate educational preparation and a poor work ethic (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2010; Oxford Business Group, 2010; Al Barwany et al, 2009; Lopez-Claros and Schwab, 2005). It has been suggested that the negative stereotypes of the Gulf workforce has led to:

*...the accumulated experience of citizens working in the government sector has contributed to the negative stereotype by expatriates and – more problematic – the internalization of these stereotypes by citizens themselves. (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2010:375)*

In terms of developing a work ethic, growing up in a context where there is a large expatriate working population, can “*prevent indigenous people from being psychologically involved in the productive system of the economy*” (Ali 2000:4). Despite its efforts to promote employment in the private sector labour market, one of the Omani government’s immediate responses to the protests of 2011 was to announce that 50,000 jobs were to be made available, 30,000 of these in the public sector and 20,000 being offered by large family firms loyal to the government. This would suggest that in the face of its citizens’ unrest the Omani government reverted to its default position in keeping its side of the Arab social contract; a provider of employment and redistributor of wealth:

*The [social] contracts have defined patterns of state-labor relations across the region and established expectations and obligations that have proved deeply resilient. They remain a powerful presence in the debates about social and economic policy reform, even as their effect on employment [and] wages...has become deleterious (World Bank, 2004, p.24)*

As with other countries in the region, the main weaknesses of the labour market are the large public sector; limited size and weak performance of the private sector in generating jobs (UNDP 2009:111); and investment in an education system which supports the attainment of academic rather than vocational qualifications (World Bank, 2004; Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008; UNDP, 2009). Remuneration has not traditionally been linked to performance and

productivity in the public sector and therefore the privileges that those working in the public sector are seen to enjoy create similar expectations amongst those about to enter the labour market (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2010).

How are the challenges facing the implementation of localisation policies being addressed regionally? Multinational companies bidding for government contracts now need to show how they will support localization (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). In the UAE, private sector employers are given a choice between investing in the recruitment and development of a UAE national employee or paying a levy for employing a fully trained and experienced expatriate (Omair, 2010). The Kuwaiti government intervenes to the extent that it pays the private sector organisations to employ Kuwaitis (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Before 1984, Saudi graduates were forbidden to work in the private sector and despite efforts to increase participation of nationals in the workforce, progress has only had success in the public sector and banking. The Saudi government has gone as far as forcing the public sector to hire Saudis for non-existent jobs; with 65 per cent of the 2003 Saudi annual budget was earmarked for salaries (Al Dosary and Rahman, 2005).

The use of quotas to support Omanisation has shown mixed results. As private sector organisations face increased competition to fulfill their quotas, there have been positive outcomes for Omanis entering the workforce, particularly graduating students. Large organisations are now carrying out interviews on campus and participate in higher education institution Career Fairs. In some institutions there has been greater engagement with on the job training and

interaction with employers (OAC, 2009). There have also been success stories in the oil sector which is now over 70% Omanised and local banking where figures show that over 90% of staff are Omani (Ministry of National Economy, 2010). As the Ministry of Manpower is responsible for both the issuance of expatriate work visas and for driving the Omanisation process there is some leverage to ensure that Omanis are given priority in key employment areas.

Bhanugopan and Fish (2007) found that one of the key challenges to the success of the localisation policies in Papua New Guinea was the unwillingness of private sector employers to recruit locals. Al Waqfi's (2010) research explored the UAE's decision to oblige organisations with over 100 employees to have an Emirati business manager, in the belief that a local HR manager would hire Emiratis (a recommendation also made by Al Lamki (2000)). However, this was found not to be true and in fact had a negative impact as a national HR manager was found to hire fewer nationals than an expatriate HR manager would. There was also a question of planning and timing as the government may localise a post before there are trained locals in the workforce to take over. In Oman in 2006 all tailoring shops and beauty parlours were Omanised but there was no trained local workforce to carry out the work. In 2011, businesses were allowed to recruit expatriates in these fields once again. Central planning is an issue. Budhwar et al (2002) noted that although there are national development policies in Oman, there is no link to operational strategies to achieve these.

With organisations focusing on fulfilling quotas rather than providing career paths, the human capital development objective is overshadowed:

*The challenge boils down to this: what do we really mean by Gulfization/Omanization? Is it merely a process of replacing foreign workers with locals? Or is it simply an exercise in manipulating numbers and statistics? (Al Lamki 2000:9)*

Al Lamki (2000) suggests that expatriates should have a clause in their employment contract requiring them to train Omanis within a specified period. An incentive system could be developed to encourage the training and development of an Omani employee. Asking expatriates to train their own replacements can be problematic; the experience in China would suggest that locals find it difficult as they have to train in a strained/tense interpersonal dynamic (Fryxell et al, 2004).

Another key challenge to the success of localisation policies is the difference in organisational culture between the public and private sector working environments. Bhanugopan and Fish (2007) describe localisation as an 'interactive learning process' as locals moving into the positions of expatriates may have issues with verbal communication; cultural misunderstandings and unfamiliarity with foreign business standards and a difference in compensation. Al Lamki (2000) highlights that private sector organisations will have a different corporate culture and work environment compared to the public sector; in Oman the private sector is predominantly managed by expatriates and therefore has developed an expatriate-oriented culture and work ethos. Omanis joining the private sector will therefore need to be "acculturated" to an unfamiliar working

environment. Al Lamki (2000) and Aycan et al (2007) describe the growth of a distinctive expatriate-oriented culture in terms of management style, organisational culture, in the private sector which, according to Al Lamki, could be seen as a potential hurdle in encouraging Omani employees. However, Aycan *et al*'s subsequent research would suggest a shift in these attitudes (i.e. moving away from a traditional organisational culture):

*Omani employees...seemed to favour a 'professional' approach in managing people and organizations in which there would be less reliance on informal networks, nepotism, groupism and authority hierarchy. This contrasts with the historical structure of Omani society, based on tribal allegiance and extended obligations (Aycan et al, 2007:29)*

GCC citizens, especially those who have been through higher education, are perceived to have an expectation that the government will provide jobs (ILO, 2008) and are seen to be unwilling to take on certain jobs in preference for white collar desk jobs (Al Hamadi et al, 2007). Mashood et al (2009) suggest that nationals in the region see themselves as a natural middle class and only accept work congruent with these expectations. Omani government jobs have traditionally been seen as secure with good salaries, reasonable working hours, with the possibility of retirement on up to 80% of salary after 20 years. In the GCC context, according to Forstenlechner and Rutledge, nationals:

*...have become accustomed to materials [sic] benefits with no form of extraction...due to a sense of entitlement...many nationals will wait for a government job (remaining unemployed) rather than take a private sector one in the interim, even if they are aware that the wait may last several years (2010:41)*

Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner's recent research in the UAE (2012) would indicate that there are still challenges to the integration of nationals in the private sector where most job opportunities will be created. One of the challenges to the successful implementation of localisation policies is the 'lack of exposure' to the private sector and unrealistic expectations of young people.

#### 2.4.3 The education and training system

Education is embedded in Oman's Basic Law and is supposed to:

*...create a generation strong in body and moral fibre, proud of its nation (umma), country (watan) and heritage, and committed to safeguarding its achievements (Valeri, 2009:189)*

In the localisation policies of Singapore and Malaysia in the 1980s and 1990s, educational planning was seen to be instrumental in the achievement of economic goals, being geared to the demand for skills required in specific industrial sectors (Ruppert, 1998). However, in Oman, the education and training system could be seen as having an 'education logic' rather than an 'employment logic' (Raffe, 2008) as research suggests that there is a relatively weak link between education and the labour market (Wilkins, 2002). The objectives of

Oman's National Population Strategy suggest that the government recognises its role in 'upgrading the production efficiency' of its workforce, by:

*...deepening the link between education, training and qualification; development of human resources; upgrading the production efficiency of the Omani workforce through training and qualification programme's [sic]. This will motivate businessmen to employ Omani workforce of high efficiency and productivity (Ministry of National Economy, 2003:8).*

Educational reform in Oman started with the 'Basic Education System', which was introduced in 1998. The ten-year programme aimed to teach communication and learning skills, critical thinking, science and modern technology alongside more traditional school subjects. English language teaching has been introduced from grade 1 (first year of primary). The main objective of this programme is to produce school leavers with sound numeracy and literacy skills as a basis for further education and vocational training (Ministry of National Economy, 2002). In 2002, public expenditure per primary pupil in Oman was equivalent to \$1766; per secondary pupil \$2765; and per tertiary level student \$7248 (World Bank, 2008:12).

In the Arab region, a World Bank report published in 2008 revealed that despite the significant investment in education, this "*has not been translated into higher standards of living nor to the economy at large*" and that the fact that MENA countries have some of the highest levels of public sector employment in the



world has meant a “*suboptimal use of labour and created expectations that could not be fulfilled*” (2008:296).

Although there is little literature on Oman in this area, many students in the region perceive good jobs as those requiring a university degree, thereby putting energy into achieving qualifications that are not necessarily in demand by private sector employers (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). School leavers opting for higher education programs, often end up in jobs that do not require a university education and do not necessarily depend on the area that they studied:

*...this is a clear manifestation of the squandering and misuse of resources, a phenomenon that runs counter to the requirements for creating a diverse human resource capital capable of meeting the needs of comprehensive, integrated and sustained development”*  
(UNDP, 2009:113)

Higher education programmes offered in Oman do not necessarily align with the needs of the labour market; a study of all higher education offerings in Oman found that 66% of programmes are offered in only four broad fields of study: business and administration; computing; engineering and humanities (Carroll, 2007). Because of the important role of the public sector in the past, the education system is geared towards public sector employment even though the intention is to reduce public sector employment. From a young person’s viewpoint, the public sector is the largest employer of university educated workers in the region which strongly influences the incentives to enroll in

academically orientated post secondary education (Silver, 2007). Academic routes are seen as the premium: *“rigid education systems and labour markets have proven less capable of mediating young people’s transitions to adulthood successfully”* (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008:10).

Oman is having to compete with its Gulf neighbours for its share of foreign direct investment, and aims to do so with a well-educated workforce:

*A more highly educated workforce avoids not only a reliance on foreign labour but also means that the number of options Oman is able to present to possible foreign investors is much greater than other local rivals all seeking to target a small number of sectors and firms (Nash, 2007:41).*

As there are few opportunities for young Omanis to enter the workplace without some form of tertiary education or training, a significant challenge is to provide an adequate number of places for the growing number of school-leavers. Al Lamki (2000) notes:

*The dynamic growth of the Sultanate’s public general (pre-tertiary) education system has outpaced the growth of the public higher (post secondary) education system...This has resulted in a large population of secondary school graduates competing for limited opportunities for higher education in the country (2000:77).*

In June 2003, there were 41,568 school leavers matriculating but only 2,400 places available at Sultan Qaboos University (the only government-funded university) with another 2,400 places available at 14 private licensed institutions (D'Souza and Kapur, 2003). According to government statistics, there were 1,976 students studying at vocational training centres in the academic year 2002/2003 and a total of 2,626 students studying at the five industrial technical colleges in the same year (Ministry of National Economy, 2003). A Royal Decree in 1996 opened the doors for the development of private education colleges in the country and the growth of the private sector has been stimulated by the government's decision to initiate scholarship schemes, in order to attract students to study in the private sector (Al Lamki, 2002). The government provided a number of incentives for these new institutions such as land, exemption from taxation for five years and scholarships for students from low income families (Al Barwany *et al*, 2009). At the time of writing there are over 27 private higher education institutions, four of which are universities. However, it is evident that an increase in the number of institutions has not resulted in an increase in the range of programmes offered. This lack of breadth may be a challenge in the face of Oman's ongoing development and a workforce planning analysis will be required to prioritise potential new programmes.

Despite the increase in the number of employees the private sector takes on, the sector does not have same influence on youth incentives for education or expectations for employment as the public sector. In Oman, where private sector employment is heavily regulated, private employers behave like public employers and give more weight to ex ante (prior) qualifications such as degrees. Both the

public and private sector therefore send out strong signals in favour of a university education which discourages investment, either from institutions or the individuals themselves, in non-academic skills development. It has been argued that education does not ease transition to employment in the Middle East and the limited pathways for employment have led to the exclusion of youth from the activities of mainstream society, i.e. not able to marry, form families and play an active role in their society (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). It has been suggested that the root cause of this youth exclusion lies in the institutions (i.e. education, labour, credit housing and marriage) that mediate transitions from school to work and family formation:

*“[these institutions] provide the signals that tell young people what skills to learn, tell firms who to hire and how much to pay, tell credit agencies to whom to lend and tell families how to evaluate the potential of a young person as a future spouse and parent” (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008:5)*

Therefore “exhorting young people to study and work is fruitless if there are no avenues for social inclusion” (Silver, 2007:16). One of the responses to the ‘Arab Spring’ of 2011 proposed:

*...what [the Arab Spring] has vividly demonstrated is that producing endless number of graduates from educational establishments is no longer a key yardstick of economic and social development, but matching graduates with meaningful and value added jobs is more*

*critical to social, economic and political stability. Graduates with no hope of meaningful employment feel they are victims of an educational system that has succeeded in providing them with qualifications that cannot be used and, worst of all, with expectations that cannot be met (Ramady, 2011)*

Unlike Europe where unemployment is typically higher amongst the unskilled, in the Middle East it is the well-educated and well-trained that are disproportionately unemployed (Silver, 2007:6). Higher education in Oman differs from higher education in other contexts. As noted in section 1.2 (Table 1), there has been a significant increase in the number of Omanis entering higher education from 16,463 in 1996 to 93,500 in 2008 (a substantial 468% increase). Typically, going to college or university is seen as an extension to school rather than the first step on the road to independence. The majority of students are full-time, living at home or in hostels and around 70% receive free tuition along with a small monthly stipend towards living expenses. Many will be the first generation of Omanis in their family with access to higher education. Although little research has been carried out in Oman exploring the unemployment level amongst graduates, one of the government's responses to the protests of 2011 was to offer more full-time scholarships for school leavers to enroll in private sector higher education institutions (an additional 9000 places offered for students to enroll on Bachelor degree programmes in addition to the annual 7000) as the public higher education institutions were already heavily oversubscribed.

As in other regional contexts (Ezzine, 2010), the mismatch between the skills required by the labour market (particularly the private sector employers) and the training and education system is seen as a fundamental challenge to the recruitment of graduates. Oman would seem to be under the influence of the neo-classical, non-interventionist policies of its prospective Western trade partners. According to Oman's Minister of Commerce and Industry at the time, "[the] composition of labour demand in the private sector is generally conditioned by market forces" (Oxford Business Group, 2009:181). From the employers' perspective, non-graduates with technical skills may be more valuable in the workplace (Oxford Business Group, 2010). However, Oman has struggled with the development of a viable vocational education and training (VET) system to meet the needs of a high skills agenda. There are a number of reasons for this. One is the fact that in Gulf society, there is a low regard for the vocational stream of learning, as Mellahi and Al Hinai (2000) found in their study of the vocational education programs in Saudi Arabia. This was also found to be the case in the UAE: "the greatest challenge facing the UAE government is encouraging nationals to take up manual and technical jobs and jobs in the private sector" (Mashood *et al*, 2009:4). VET is usually the reserve of those who have not done well in compulsory education and therefore come in to the training without a firm grasp of the basic skills required (World Bank, 2008). As the Omani VET system has focused on educating its school leavers rather than those in work, vocational training has not been perceived as a means for upgrading and supporting the skills needed in a knowledge-based economy. Another challenge facing the development of the VET system is a lack of fit, as the focus on the supply-led dimension of educational institutions has meant no provision as yet for formal,

embedded mechanisms to respond to labour market needs. On the other hand, employers in Omani-owned organisations would seem to offer a different perspective: *“If we hire an Omani and do not train him/her we are not giving any benefit to society not just employ people without any qualifications...[we] have to take it upon ourselves to foster both skills and professionalism”* (Oxford Business Group, 2009:184). Al Lamki (2000) and Wilkins (2002) point out that in many organisations, particularly small and medium enterprises, expatriate managers may well be unwilling and unlikely to transfer skills to their potential replacements.

#### 2.4.4 Gender in the transition context

An individual's gender has been found to have a significant influence on the youth transition experience in industrialised countries (Woolley, 2005; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006). In the Middle East region, employment for women has been traditionally in government-funded posts, particularly in clerical positions and in teaching (Silver, 2007). According to the 2002 Arab Human Development Report the lack of women's empowerment in Arab countries is one of the defining features of the Arab countries that impede development; the Arab world is ranked next to last in the world regions with regard to gender empowerment measure (Al Lamki, 2006).

Since 1970 there has been a significant transformation in Oman's gender scenario, from no formal education for girls to thousands of female students participating in all levels of education. Females have been outnumbering male students in terms of higher education enrollment (World Bank, 2008) but also outperform them academically. There has also been a decrease in the number

of births per woman: between 1990 and 1995 the average number of children was 6.3 compared to the predicted average of 2.8 between 2010 and 2015 based on current trends (United Nations, 2010). According to Omani government figures, in 2009 women made up 31% of the total number of Omani nationals working in the public sector<sup>7</sup> (from a total number of 159,538 employees) and 90% of these have a postgraduate qualification (the majority holding diplomas or bachelor degrees). Just over 70% of women in the public sector are working in the Ministry of Education, with around 22% working in the Ministry of Health. These figures confirm the tendency for Omani families and society to orientate girls to teaching or caring professions, as indicated in research carried out with trainee teachers in Oman's College of Education (Al Belushi *et al*, 1999):

*Doing what others 'expect' creates a gap between the individual and society, and the individual and her career 'choice'. Conforming must create an unusual relationship between the individual who chooses and their choice. It is unlikely that this relationship will be positive or creative (p.19).*

In the private sector in 2009, women made up just over 18% of Omani nationals in the workforce, only 3% of the total number. However, the total number of women in the workforce make up just under 8% of the total number of women aged 20 – 59 in the population (Ministry of National Economy, 2010). Women in informal work or who are self-employed are not accounted for. Omani Labour

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<sup>7</sup> Figures are not published for the number of employees in the Royal Oman Police nor the Ministry of Defence.



Law proclaims equal rights for men and women; government recruitment practices ensure equal chances for men and women and equal pay provided they have the same qualifications and experience (Al Lamki, 2006). However:

*on the legal front, legislation for equal opportunity and rights often remain to be “ink on paper”...the administrative practices do not abide by the legal statements due to lack of regulatory or auditing procedures with regard to gender discrimination (Al Lamki, 2006:52).*

Women in employment present a challenge to what is essentially a patriarchal society (Al Lamki, 2006; Neal *et al*, 2005; Kostiner, 2000). Women now have more economic power than in the past as well as access to education and contraception; the traditional model family of the Arabic society now has fewer children, and women in employment are challenging men as being the sole providers of the family (Al Barwany and Albeely 2008). Traditionally women have been dependent on marriage; it has been the responsibility of the future husband to provide the dowry and, as a result, *waithood* for men also has implications for women's transition to adulthood (Al Barwany and Albeely, 2008). It has also been suggested that time and resources invested in education makes women more marriageable than employable; Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon (2008) propose that women face greater hardship in work to school transition in Middle East than men. One factor inhibiting women's entry into employment is the sense of *aib* or shame as men are seen as not being able to provide for their dependents and this may be one reason for the low rates of Arab women participating in the

labour market (Harry, 2007; Lopez-Claros, 2005). However, there is less *aib* associated with women taking up a government job than working for the private sector which creates more competition for public sector employment. Conditions in the private sector are deemed unsuitable for women with small firms not providing the same sense of security as public sector employment; it has been suggested that women have a fear of sexual harassment in the smaller workplace (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). Traditionally in the GCC, women are discouraged from travelling far from home to work or to mix with non-family members (Harry, 2007). There has been discrimination against married women who are seen as having weak workplace commitment as employers believe that they will leave work once they are married or have children. According to Al Lamki (2006) *“those who are hired receive less training, promotional opportunities and generally earn less than men in similar jobs”* (p.52).

Regional localisation policies have been shown to provide employment for groups seen as traditionally disadvantaged, such as women. In the UAE, for example, localisation strategies have attributed to national women's increasing participation in the labour market and an increase in the number of women in management positions in organisations. As Omair states:

*...for national women, nationalisation of the labour market provides privilege in recruitment and selection, education and training, career development and remuneration” (2010:126).*

Chatty (2000) noted in her research that the requirement for local cleaning companies to meet Omanisation quotas has meant the provision of unskilled employment opportunities for illiterate women. It has been suggested, however, that there is still bias against women in the labour markets (UNDP, 2009) which impedes women's participation in the labour market and Harry suggests that the bias "*will become even stronger when the competition for jobs is not against foreigners but against male citizens*" (Harry, 2007:138). According to Harry (2007), women are not attracted to many of the jobs taken by expatriate workers such as domestic jobs, although in Oman there has been an increase in the number of women working in banking, insurance and retail sectors. It has been suggested that new types of jobs will need to be created for this new generation of educated women; enterprise could be encouraged as it has been found in the region that women are often more successful than men at setting up and running small businesses (Fergany, 1998).

#### 2.4.5 The influence of socio-cultural factors

*As they experience transitions in their lives from different social locations defined by age, gender and social class, these behaviours and perceived possibilities are mediated by cultural factors such as normative 'expectations' (Evans, 2002:253)*

Any exploration of young people's education to work transition context needs to acknowledge the impact of socio-cultural factors and their influence. Arab culture emphasises the importance of kinship and family behaviours such as patriarchy; acceptance of authority without question; and self interest subordinate to the

interests of the family (Dirani, 2006; Kabasakal and Bodur, 2002). Families, rather than individuals, are considered to be the building blocks of society and are responsible for shaping the roles of young people at home and in the workplace. Oman, in common with other countries in the region, has enshrined in law the family as the unit of legal recognition rather than the individual:

*The individual as an "autonomous" subject, endowed with inalienable rights and responsibilities which accrue to her/him as a person, apart from social identities and networks, while juridically and (often) socially salient, is more often than not been overridden by the notion of the person as nestled in relationships of kinship and community (Joseph, 2002:24)*

The family relationships and collective values that Arab youth have grown up with are not necessarily consistent with the more recent emphasis on individualisation in industrialised countries arising from economic development and other influences such as globalisation (United Nations, 2007; Russell *et al.*, 2005). Individualisation has been described as the “*formation of individualistic identities at the expense of collective identity*” (Rudd and Evans 1998:41).

Culture has been defined in terms of ‘patterns’, ‘common meanings’ and ‘values for a collection of individuals’, a sense of something ‘traditional’ and ‘historical’ (Kroeber and Kluckhohn, 1952; Geertz, 1993). For social psychologists, culture is “*collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from others*” (Hofstede, 2005:4) and “*shared ways that*

*groups of people understand and interpret the world” (Trompenaars, 1993:21).*

House *et al* (2001) suggest that culture belongs to a ‘collective’ and is passed down from one generation to another:

*[Culture is] shared motives, values, beliefs, identities and interpretation of meanings of significant events that results from common experiences of members of collectives and are transmitted across age generations (2001:494).*

For much of the research in the Gulf and the Middle East, national culture has been subsumed within a generic “Arab culture”. The binding feature would appear to be religion:

*...social and ethical obligations of a Muslim are based on the belief that the Islamic community is a brotherhood where equality in personal worth, regardless of status and wealth prevail (Kabasakal and Bodur, 2002:44).*

According to Ali (2008) the Islamic work ethic urges hard work and commitment to the community. Research based on interviews with representatives of youth in the Arab world<sup>8</sup> (Gallup, 2009) would suggest that religion is not just a structural factor to be considered shaping or influencing the education to work transition context: “faith, family and decent jobs are inextricably linked” (Gallup, 2009:24).

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<sup>8</sup> Between February and April 2009, Gallup polled 8,597 national youth (aged 15 to 29) across 19 countries that were members of the League of Arab States and the Somaliland autonomous region (Gallup 2009:9). However, Oman was not included.

When respondents were asked to rate the importance of career, family and faith, having a spiritual life and starting a family were essential and seen as more important than having a good quality job. Over 90% of Arab youth interviewed in each country said that religion was an important part of their daily lives and around eight out of ten respondents believed that “God was directly involved in things that happen in the world” (Gallup, 2009:24).

Variation in values, beliefs and assumptions exist even within a relatively homogenous cultural context (Gahan and Abeysekera, 2009; Al Hamadi *et al*, 2007). Oman has a number of intra-cultural influences within the one nation. A high proportion of the population originates from former East African trading posts in Zanzibar and Dar es Salaam (about a quarter of the population use Swahili as their first language at home). There is also a high proportion of Baluchi, people originating from Baluchistan (an ethnic/geographical region overlapping the borders of present-day Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan) (Neal *et al*, 2005). Research carried out in the GCC region showed that respondents were highly collectivist with the tribal or extended family group but highly individualist with the ‘out-group’ (non-kin, tribal and expatriate colleagues) (Mellahi and Wood, 2001).

Collective culture institutions tend to replicate family and social relations and the strong patriarchal social system:

*...when job competition stiffens, job allocation in patriarchal society works on a non-merit basis...individuals will attempt to procure their jobs through connections (Nasser and Abouchedid, 2006:170)*

Connections are a form of social capital, defined as “social relations based on trust, cooperation and reciprocity” (ILO, 2008:28), highlighting the importance of the relationships between individuals; these can be productive in the transition context for providing advice about the quality and availability of employment (Strathdee, 2001). Strathdee’s research in New Zealand would suggest that in some industrialised countries social capital is in decline, replaced by impersonal mechanisms introduced by governments which reduce face to face interactions which is considered to put jobseekers at a disadvantage.

‘Wasta’ (influence) has been considered a significant factor in connecting young people to jobs in Oman: *“In the Arab World, kinship, locale, ethnicity, religion and wealth render some people more privileged than others in obtaining employment”* (Hutching and Weir, 2006:151). Wasta can be seen as a type of ‘negative’ social capital:

*A wasta system can provide social, psychological, and economic well-being...Until the dissatisfaction of those disadvantaged by wasta becomes a significant political issue, or the concern for declining societal productivity becomes a national priority, intercessionary wasta excesses will continue (Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1994:36)*

The influence of *wasta* is seen as particularly unfair when it has an influence on recruitment and selection. Nasser and Abouchedid (2006) suggested that whereas in the Western world job seeking behaviour depends to a large extent on societal structures, graduate jobseekers in Lebanon were more likely to procure jobs through friends and family rather than through formal application procedures, particularly for female graduates. The Omani Ministry of Civil Service has recently introduced a policy to ensure that vacant public sector positions are publicly advertised and that transparent recruitment procedures are followed in order to try and avoid 'wasta', although its degree of success has yet to be assessed. In an opinion poll carried out by Arab Archives Institute in 2001 amongst Arab professionals, 87% stressed the need to eradicate 'wasta' but still thought that they would be using it sometime in their lives (Hutchings and Weir, 2006).

Omanis have been called upon to contribute to the nation's human capital:

*Omanis should...play a substantial role in all fields, no one should shun the jobs of his father and forefathers, or hesitate to make use of the job opportunities available in the private sector on the pretext that he holds an academic degree and that he should have a government job (HM Speech to State Council 9 January 1988 cited in Valeri 2009:201)*



Specific jobs also have a social status. Regional research suggests that families would rather support a young person into their twenties over them having to accept low status jobs, thereby reducing incentives to become self-reliant early in life (Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). Although kin marriages mean that young men have less pressure to show external assurances of future financial security, in Oman a young man is more eligible as a bachelor (i.e. marriageable) if he is in steady public sector employment with more accessibility to loans for the dowry and to establish a household.

The research carried out by Aykan et al (2007) suggests that there is a growing diversity of values between the younger and older generation in Oman, such as less willingness to engage in collective decision-making, indicating that younger employees are less collectivist and are moving away from traditional values. Could this move away from traditional values mean that there is a greater sense of individualisation for those entering the transition context in Oman? Al Lamki suggests that it is society itself that has a role to play in influencing job seekers' expectations:

*...Omani society, through its various institutions, such as family, media, schools, colleges, universities, mosques and all other social communities should promote and nurture positive values and attitude towards work. There is a need to instill confidence in the citizens' ability to pursue work successfully and to inculcate a sense of duty and responsibility among the citizens to serve their country to the best of their knowledge and ability (2000:14)*

Despite efforts to encourage youth entering the workforce to take up employment in all sectors (Valeri, 2009), regional research suggests that individual's attitudes to working in the private sector are deeply ingrained. Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2012) found that, amongst young Emiratis, private sector employment was still seen as low ranking and lacking in prestige.

#### 2.4.6 The role of the individual

The focus of the second part of this chapter has been a review of the structural factors in Oman such as the government and its policies, the labour market, the education and training system, gender and the social context which underpin the framework of young people's education to work transitions, informed by other literature based on the Middle East region. However, what is the role of the individual in this context? As proposed in chapter one, young people are expected to play an active role in their transition context but while there has been a considerable amount of research on young people's perspectives in industrialised economies (see **Table 3** in section 3.1), limited research on this has been carried out in Oman or in the region. Other research studies in industrialised countries (McKeown and Lindorff, 2011; Tomlinson, 2007; Perrone and Vickers, 2003) indicate that graduating students need support in managing their expectations and the realities of entering today's labour market.

In his annual speech to the Omani nation in 2005, Sultan Qaboos exhorted young people to:

*...involve themselves in their job when they get one, and must show exemplary behaviour. Involvement in the job is a duty and if the job is available today, it may not be the case tomorrow any more (Valeri, 2009:204).*

Young people's involvement in the 2011 protests is an indication that not all jobseekers are able to 'involve themselves in a job'. Although there are no official figures on unemployment, government population and employment statistics show that in 2009 there were a total of 972,539 Omanis of working age (20 – 59), 50.4% female. Of that number 136,622 Omanis were registered as working in the private sector and 159,538 working in the public sector (Ministry of National Economy, 2010). While these figures do not take into account those working in the police or military sectors or those owning their business, the figures suggest that there is considerable underemployment. In his 2005 speech, Sultan Qaboos explained that *'unemployment is a terrible word and nobody understands it at all. It is better to use the term 'people in search of employment'* (Valeri, 2009:204). This may be semantics, but if unemployment is not accepted as a concept then developing approaches to address it, is an even greater challenge. Exploring graduate expectations may provide some insight into the influence of the structural factors and the role of individual agency in this context. Reference has already been made above to research carried out by Al Lamki (1998) in Oman and Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2012) in the UAE to explore graduates' expectations. Findings of these research studies suggest that the historical legacy of government-based employment still has an influence on

young people. Status, salary and working conditions in the public sector are strong motivating factors.

How do other young people in the region see their role? Russell *et al.* (2005) carried out research into youth transitions in the UAE, with two groups of 13 – 18 years olds (one male, one female), with a focus on perceptions of what they thought would happen in the future and motivating factors. Russell *et al.*'s findings indicated that for girls, gaining independence was their most important aspiration whereas boys felt that having clear life aims would support their future transitions. The research also found that young people feel quite isolated in planning for their future with a lack of parental support in career guidance and little connection between home and school.

In light of the lack of academic-based research, the findings of recent large scale surveys provide interesting insight into young people's views in the region. The Silatech Survey (Gallup, 2009) sponsored by the Qatari government carried out over eight and a half thousand structured interviews across 19 Arab states (see section 2.4.5) in an effort to explore young people's outlook on the subject of job creation, what they need access to and what obstacles they identify. Findings showed that for over 70% of GCC-based respondents<sup>9</sup>, having a good quality job was seen as essential. The primary obstacles identified by the respondents were their country's lack of economic readiness, selection system readiness, particularly the need for connections and *wasta*, and workforce readiness. When respondents were asked where they preferred to work, assuming pay and

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<sup>9</sup> Oman was the only GCC country not included

conditions were similar, over 66% of GCC-based interviewees indicated that they were most interested in working for the government sector, compared to an overall average of 49%, with only around 10% of GCC-based respondents preferring to work in the private sector or run their own business. According to this poll:

*Arab youth generally believe that those responsible for the progress in their societies are maximizing the potential of youth in their respective countries. Majorities say this is the case in their countries...79% in the GCC and Iraq region. But do youth believe they are doing enough to help themselves?...Among youth in the GCC and Iraq region, similar percentages of youth tend to believe those responsible for progress are maximizing youth potential as [the percentage that] believe youth are doing enough to help themselves (Gallup, 2009:26)*

The views on whose responsibility for maximizing potential of youth would suggest that for these young people structural factors and agency have an equal role to play. The findings of the 2012 Arab Youth Survey (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2012) were based on 2,500 face to face interviews in 12 Middle East countries including Oman<sup>10</sup>. What did this survey find in terms of expectations and motivating factors? The top priority for young people was being paid a fair wage with the overall average at 82% and Omanis at 90%. Nearly three quarters of the Omani respondents believed that their best days lay ahead of them with

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<sup>10</sup> Interviews with 150 18-24 year olds were carried out in Oman

61% indicating that they had more opportunities now than a year ago. As this survey was carried out after the Arab Spring, there was a significant focus on the role of democracy; about half the Omanis interviewed thought that democracy was the biggest obstacle facing the Middle East and that living in a democratic country was important to them.

In 2010, the first national graduate survey of students in Oman from private higher education institutions was carried out via an online questionnaire by the Ministry of Higher Education (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010). 1064 respondents completed the survey, 61% female and 39% male. The most interesting findings of the study showed that students were proactive in their job search behaviour with over 56% starting to look for a job prior to graduation but young people were dependent on *wasta* (influence – discussed in section 2.4.5) and personal contacts to find good jobs. One of the intentions behind establishing the national Public Authority for Manpower Register in 2011 was to promote transparent and fair recruitment practices in both the public and private sectors, with all vacant positions being channeled through this department.

This research provides an opportunity to explore the role of the individual within the education to work transition context. As Evans (2007) notes individuals may be active participants in the education to work transition or “passive individualists” moving along “socially accepted career patterns, without a sense of ultimate goal or overall direction” (Evans, 2007:86). The methodology used in this research is discussed in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY**

### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide the rationale for the research approach and design in relation to the overall objectives of this research. The chapter also includes the ethical considerations and the approach to sampling for the focus groups and self-completion questionnaires. The two research instruments are then explored in more detail, including how the schedule and questionnaire was developed and how the data was analysed. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the limitations of the research methodology.

### **3.2 Research Approach and Design**

It is important to consider the perspectives of young people in any attempt to understand the youth transition process (Woolley, 2009). Research on youth transitions from education to work has tended to fall into two camps: either a focus on national scale statistical survey-type analysis (Raffe, 2003; Bynner and Chisholm, 1998) or from the perspective of the individuals in the transition context themselves. The former supports a macro view of the transition context, facilitating trend analysis or longitudinal or cross-country comparison (such as those seen in OECD or ILO reports) and is primarily based on quantitative analysis. Depending on the purpose (and the provenance of funding) research on the individual's perspective has ranged from large scale questionnaires (e.g. Boudarbat, 2008; Yorke and Knight, 2007) reflecting an objective, positivist approach to youth transitions, to more qualitative approaches to develop an understanding of the transition phenomenon from the actor's viewpoint or various

combinations of the two. Over the last twenty years, there has been a significant amount of research carried out in this area incorporating a range of approaches and designs (see **Table 3**).

Authors	date	location	focus	research approach
Morrow	2012	India	Transition experiences of young people in India	case studies
McKeown and Lindorff	2011	Australia	Job seeking strategies	qualitative interviews
Bradley and Devadson	2008	UK	Typology for youth transitions to contemporary labour market	mixed methods: qualitative interviews and large scale survey data
Goodwin and O'Connor	2007	UK	Comparing transition data from 1960's with later views on school to work transition	interviews
Holden and Hamblett	2007	UK	Higher education students entering workplace	biographical – 5 case studies over 2 years
Molgat	2007	Canada	Self-conceptions of adulthood	qualitative interviews 25-29 age group
Tomlinson	2007	UK	Managing transitions	semi-structured interviews with 53 final year undergraduates
Yorke and Knight	2007	UK	Self-efficacy and employability experience	large scale questionnaires
Ng and Burke	2006	Canada	Commissioned by companies to explore expectations of recent graduates	quantitative large scale field survey
Roberts	2006	Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine	Contrasting communist and post-communist transitions	surveys with 1800 25–29-year-olds
Thomson et al	2005	England and N. Ireland	Youth Values Study: Inventing Adulthoods	longitudinal qualitative study memory books, multiple interviews and focus groups
Stokes, Wierenga and Wyn	2004	Australia	Young People's Perceptions of Career Education, VET, Enterprise Education and Part-time Work.	400 semi-structured interviews
Perrone and Vickers	2003	Australia	Transition from university to work	semi-structured interviews
Mortimer et al	2002	USA	Longitudinal youth study – occupational decision-making	qualitative semi-structured interviews
Heinz	2002	Germany	review of Germany's dual system and impact of change – focus on skilled	quantitative and qualitative longitudinal



			young adults	research
Evans et al	2001	UK and Germany	Funded by ESRC – looking at young adults in HE, work, training and unemployment and their control	mixed methods
<b>Regional</b>				
Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner	2012	UAE	Job seeking behaviour of Emiratis	semi-structured interviews
Arab Youth Survey funded by UAE	2012	Arab World	Capturing the voice of Arab Youth – employment, society and technology	structured interviews with 2500 respondents from 12 Middle East countries
Silatech/Gallup funded by Qatar	2009	Arab World (not Oman)	Attitudes of young Arabs with respect to their hopes and desires; human capital, work, entrepreneurship, and obstacles to success.	structured interviews with 8597 respondents from 19 countries across the Arab League and Somaliland
Boudarbat	2008	Morocco	Unemployment amongst university graduates	surveys
Nasser and Abouchdid	2006	Lebanon	Job search strategies of university graduates	questionnaires
Egel and Salehi-Isfahani	2005	Iran	School to work transition survey	large scale survey with ILO SWYS data
Russell et al	2005	UAE	Career expectations of age 13-18 year old school students	questionnaires
Mellahi	2000	Saudi Arabia	Perceptions on vocational training	structured interviews
Al Lamki	1998	Oman	Perception of barriers entering the private sector and human capital theory	self-completion questionnaires

**Table 3** Examples of research on youth transitions

Much of the literature on youth transitions in the Middle East (such as ILO, UNDP and World Bank reports) has focused on the analysis of available quantitative data and statistics, confirming Wyn and Woodman's claim that *"researchers, practitioners and policy-makers still tend to be more interested in what young people do than what they think"* (2006:507). However, there has been a recent increase in field-based research in the region. This is in part due to the evolution of the higher education sector in the region and the growth in number of research-active academics, as well as an increase in national government research funding. Much research has been based on a positivist, quantitative-

data based approach such as self-completion questionnaires or structured interviews (see **Table 3**). There has been very limited qualitative-based research in the region. This could be down to a number of factors such as a nascent research culture and the influence of funding bodies expecting definitive, summative evidence (the Qatari government funded the Gallup Silatech survey and the UAE government funds the Arab Youth Survey).

#### *This research study*

The initial approach and design of this research study was developed in order to explore students' views on the influence of structural factors in their transition context in Oman. As Kelle (2001) points out, the phenomenon under investigation may lend itself (or not) to a particular research method:

*Any serious methodological consideration in the framework of any science should...regard the nature of the investigated phenomenon first and thereafter address the question which method may be adequate to describe, explain or understand this phenomenon (2001:paragraph 4).*

The way we presume the social world is, has a strong influence not only on our ways of studying it but on the whole analytical framework. How researchers approach the understanding of social phenomena depends on a range of factors including their beliefs about the social world and what can be known about it (ontology), the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired (epistemology) as well as practical factors such as the purpose and goals of the research

(Molloy *et al*, 2002). A review of the research literature on capturing student views and perceptions supported the adoption of a qualitative approach to gain an understanding of how these students made sense of the world around them. Qualitative methods, which are commonly associated with a relativist or phenomenologist epistemology, are based on the ontology that there are multiple realities or multiple truths based on one's construction of reality. As Evans notes:

*Any attempt to research youth (and adult) transitions needs to include discussions about how we can faithfully and accurately discover, articulate and map out young people's attitudes and beliefs relating to their education, training and career opportunities*  
(1999:8)

A less structured approach such as a focus group based discussion allows the flexibility to follow unexpected ideas and explore nuances. The objective of using focus groups in this research was to try and understand the social world from the standpoint of individuals who are part of the ongoing action being investigated, with the researcher sharing their frame of reference (Cohen *et al*, 2000).

The key themes explored in the focus groups, along with indicators of agency and transition behaviour found in similar survey-based research (Woolley, 2005; Evans *et al*, 2001; Al Lamki, 1998), were then used in a quantitative research instrument, a self-completion questionnaire. This was distributed amongst a larger population of students in order to provide further insight into the topic of

this research. Quantitative research methods are historically associated with a positivist epistemology, based on the ontological assumption that the world can be known objectively and empirically: *“objectivism is an ontological position that implies that social phenomena confront us as external facts that are beyond our reach or influence”* (Bryman 2004:16). If social phenomena are ‘external facts’ then they can be measured and quantified as in the world of natural phenomena. According to Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004), quantitative ‘purists’ maintain that social observations should be treated as entities in the same way that physical scientists treat physical phenomena, with the observer separate from the entities that are subject to observation; social science enquiry should therefore be objective with time and context-free generalisations. Objective data are seen as free from bias or distortion in order to make such generalisations; developments and conclusions based on these data can be applied to broader populations at macro level. However, a mixed method approach may address the issue Rudd and Evans raised: *“how can social research design take into account the micro and macro dimensions of a complex educational, social and economic process such as the school to work transition?”* (1998:41). Access to a larger sample of undergraduates provided an opportunity to explore the extent to which views expressed in the focus groups were shared and also allowed specific indicators relating to transition behaviour to be analysed.

Any research adopting a multi-strategy approach needs to recognise that *“tensions may arise in multiple method designs because of differing epistemological assumptions”* (Benzies and Allen, 2001:4), i.e. between using what is essentially considered a constructivist, qualitative approach (focus

groups) and a positivist, quantitative approach to research (self-completion questionnaire). Pragmatism has been offered as a potential paradigm for a multi-method research approach (Johnson and Ongwuegbuzie, 2004; Greene, 2005; and Creswell et al, 2006). The pragmatic approach to research methodology provides the connection between epistemological concerns regarding the nature of the knowledge that is produced and the technical concerns regarding the methods that are used to generate that knowledge (Morgan, 2007). Studies on youth transitions have been based on a variety of research designs and methods depending on whether social reality is seen as existing independent of human conceptions and interpretations or whether social phenomena are seen as constructed through the perception or experience of individuals. According to Evans:

*It is one thing for researchers to write about relatively abstract conceptions of career trajectory, transition behaviour and individualisation, and quite another to draw out empirical evidence relating to these concepts from the experiences and comments of the people themselves (1999:8)*

Evans *et al* (2001) used a multi-strategy approach in their research study on youth transitions in the UK and Germany to address different aspects of the research problem and gain a more complete picture of the phenomena in question. There are a number of possible reasons for using a combination of approaches. Greene (2005) presents five justifications: *triangulation*, *complementarity*, *development*, *initiation* and *expansion*. In this research, focus

groups followed by a self-completion questionnaire were used for the purposes of complementarity and triangulation. The more unstructured approach to data collection used in the focus groups meant that participants' meanings were the focus of attention and the self-completion questionnaire supported a more structured investigation of specific themes (Bryman, 2004).

The cultural context in which the research is carried out may well have an impact on the effectiveness of using a combination of methods to understand social phenomena. Recent research carried out in Oman on cultural orientations in human resource management highlights the potential linguistic difficulties encountered during qualitative fieldwork, such as loss of meaning or potential misunderstanding when translating questions and answers (Aycan et al, 2007). While it is acknowledged that this may be an issue regardless of whether mixed research approaches are adopted or not, it may limit the choice of methods available. Rees et al (2007) found that while exploring human resource practices and Emiratisation in the UAE, expatriate participants in face to face interviews were guarded, inhibiting full analyses of the respondent's contributions. Exploring cross-cultural differences in doing research, Dimmock notes that: *'gaining the willing participation of subjects and respondents may...present a problem in cultures where power, influence and status are of great importance'* (2002:36). This would be particularly significant for researchers planning to carry interviews in cultural environments where there was high power distance, as in Oman, as the perceived status of the researcher could influence the nature of the contributions offered.

Bryman (2004) points out that it is easy to under-emphasise the significance of practical implications in conducting research, as many logistical factors need to be taken into consideration including time, resources and access to participants. The researcher also has their own personal perspective which will affect the approach to carrying out research, as Ackroyd and Fleetwood note: “*social scientists like any other group, do not begin their study without any ideas or concepts of their own: they cannot*” (2000:11). The researcher’s expertise as well as personal preference will also have an impact on how and to what extent a combined methodological approach is adopted.

### 3.3 Ethical considerations

The first ethical consideration is whether or not there is ‘*potential for harm for participants*’ (Bryman, 2004). As the UK Social Research Association (SRA) guidelines point out:

*most generalisable social research is interventionist – interviews and surveys are interventions in the life of the population studied and so should also be subject to ethical approval when possible (SRA 2004:40).*

Participants in the focus groups and respondents for the self-completion questionnaires were full-time students in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Muscat. The approach to sampling is described in section 3.4. For the focus groups, it was important to consider the proposed research interventions from the subject’s point of view. In order to minimise the potential inconvenience to

subjects, HEI staff were consulted about the ideal venue (not a classroom to avoid replicating the teacher-student dynamic) and timings of interviews.

In order to reach the participants for the focus groups and the respondents for the questionnaires, it was necessary to go through a 'gatekeeper' for each institution, who was either the Dean or senior member of the teaching staff. As pointed out in the SRA Ethical guidelines, the researcher should not: "*devolve [their] responsibility to protect the subject's interests on to the gatekeeper. [They] should also be wary of inadvertently disturbing the relationship between subject and gatekeeper*" (SRA 2004:29). Although the gatekeeper provided an opportunity to carry out the research, informed consent was also given by the people involved in the focus groups. It was necessary to take into account that there is a tradition of 'mutual favours' in Oman, whereby a person asked to be involved in any way in the research, especially a gatekeeper, may see this as 'doing a favour' and may expect some good deed in return at some time in the future. For all four institutions involved in the research (apart from the institution where the questionnaires were piloted), a formal request was submitted to the head of the HEI to carry out research in their institution in order to ensure transparency of the approval process. Face to face meetings were held with all gatekeepers prior to arranging the focus groups or for the distribution of the questionnaires to ensure that the research motives were clear. As I am employed by a government external quality assurance agency, it was important that my motives for research were clear and not questioned or treated with suspicion when visiting HEIs. The British Sociological Association (2002) highlights the importance of professional integrity as social researchers: "*need to*



*consider the effects of their involvements and the consequences of their work or its misuse for those they study and other interested parties*". It was important to be clear about my role as a researcher and to build a 'firewall' between the research data and my role in quality assurance activities in my work.

Potential participants were sent an introductory letter (see Appendix A) via the gatekeeper in advance inviting them to join the meeting, giving a clear outline of the reason for the meeting, the topics for discussion and alerting participants to the fact that the meeting would be recorded. Although the focus groups were held in English, a female Omani interpreter (not associated with any HEI) was available if respondents wanted to express their views in Arabic (which happened on a few occasions). The Omani interpreter had been made aware of the ethical implications prior to joining the focus groups. The presence of the interpreter did not seem to have any inhibiting or negative impact on the discussions during the focus group meetings. At the beginning of each meeting, a brief recap on the purpose of the meeting was given in English and Arabic along with a confidentiality rule so that participants could feel free to contribute without fear that their utterances will be repeated elsewhere. Participants were also reminded that they could leave the meeting at any time.

Howarth's field research experience illustrates the point that *"researchers cannot disengage from their own culturally defined ways of sense making and hence impose these on the analysis"* (2002:5). During the focus group meetings, in developing the questionnaire and analysing my research findings, it was important to be aware of and monitor my own cultural bias and perspective

(Thomas, 2008). Having lived in Oman for nearly twelve years it is possible that, consciously and subconsciously, views and bias exist with regard to the research context. A conscious effort was therefore made to approach this research with an open mind and to try and avoid looking for confirmation of currently held beliefs. This has involved questioning my assumptions and conclusions. For example, I was made aware of my assumptions when I had to double check with a female student in one of the focus groups whether or not she was Omani as she was not in traditional Omani dress and stated that she had attended a non-Omani school. Following the focus group meetings, I asked the interpreter for her feedback on whether in her view my behaviour had been appropriate and whether the meeting had had a negative impact on the participants. No issues were identified.

The influence of the 'social desirability' factor was an important consideration to note, as students may have given answers which they thought would have put them in a favourable light, especially if they had to identify themselves. This also had clear implications for the issue of confidentiality:

*"It is the social researcher's responsibility to ensure that the identities of subjects are protected...neither the use of subject pseudonyms nor anonymity is any guarantee of confidentiality...So social researchers need to remove the opportunities for others to infer identities from their data" (SRA 2004:39)*

Although students in the focus group meetings were asked to complete a form with information about their area of study, their age, where they lived and whether or not they were sponsored students, they were not asked to give their names or any other information that would identify them. The self-completion questionnaires were also anonymous. Another consideration was that the subjects involved in qualitative research may have had their own cultural bias towards me as a non-Omani woman carrying out research in their institution. In the interests of social desirability, subjects may have been inclined to tell me what they thought I wanted to hear.

With the self-completion questionnaires distributed to cohorts of graduating Omani students, I needed to ensure that the surveys were not seen as tools for assessment or evaluation (especially as they were distributed in their educational institutions). The variety of approaches used to distribute the questionnaires in the different institutions is outlined in section 3.6. The questionnaires were in English and Arabic in order to ensure that they were accessible to all respondents.

### **3.4 Sampling**

The primary consideration for sampling is to ensure that the research sample represents the salient characteristics required: “units are chosen because they typify a circumstance or hold a characteristic that is expected or known to have salience to the subject matter under study” (Ritchie et al, 2003:83). Because the stratifying criteria for the sample frame was deliberately chosen, sampling was a combination of a purposeful sampling strategy (in as much as specific population criteria were specified) and convenience sampling (in this case volunteer

sampling) due to the ease of access this approach afforded. Purposeful sampling strategy has been described as “particular settings, persons, or events are deliberately selected for the important information they can provide that cannot be gotten as well from other choices” (Teddlie and Yu, 2007:77). Within the specific sample frame, convenience sampling was carried out by the gatekeepers in the various higher education institutions where the focus groups were being held and the questionnaires distributed. It is recognised that convenience sampling has its drawbacks in terms of providing a representative sample (for example in contrast to probability sampling) (Bryman, 2004) and this will need to be considered during the analysis as the findings will not necessarily be generalisable to the overall target population.

As the target population focused on students studying in business-related programmes, this provided the main criteria for the HEIs approached. Colleges in Muscat were chosen primarily because of ease of access but this also reduced the number of variables to be considered. Sultan Qaboos University (SQU) was selected because it was involved in Al Lamki’s earlier research and six other colleges were chosen which offered business related programmes. All HEIs were contacted (via College Deans) to invite students to participate in focus groups and for questionnaires to be circulated amongst their students. SQU and one of the colleges (College A) were the only ones to respond with regard to setting up focus groups; SQU, College A and three other colleges offering business-related programmes agreed for me to circulate the questionnaires at a later date.

### 3.4.1 Focus groups

As mentioned in section 3.2, focus groups were chosen as fora to explore students' views on their transition context in a relatively open-ended setting and to encourage the discussion of themes in terms of the opportunities and constraints they perceived. As Al Lamki's findings (1998) was one of the initial reference points for this research, the parameters of her research study i.e. final year students in SQU provided a model for purposeful sample selection to obtain 'information rich' data (Patton, 2002). As one of the research variables was whether students attended a government or private higher education institution, College A, a private higher education institution based in Muscat, was also approached to participate in the focus groups. It had also been decided to narrow the focus on students in business-related programmes to provide some frame of comparison at the analysis stage. Access to potential participants was through a senior member of administrative staff in the academic department running the business programme in each institution. These staff members were given the stratifying criteria: full-time Omani students in final year of study in a business-related programme, aged between 21 – 25 years old (the age range was provided for College A as SQU enrolls virtually no mature students in undergraduate programmes). Two groups were to be set up in each institution; one male and one female. The decision was made to separate male and female students as previous experience with focus groups in the region suggests that a mixed sex group could inhibit open-ended discussion (Thomas, 2008). Following discussions with the gatekeepers, it was decided that an open invitation letter would be sent to potential focus group participants via the gatekeeper (hard copy and circulated via email) in each institution. Students were invited to contact the

gatekeeper to express their interest in joining the focus groups and the gatekeeper kept a list of prospective participants. Although Ritchie and Lewis (2003) suggest that focus groups should involve between four and ten people, gatekeepers were asked to slightly over-recruit for each session (as recommended by Bryman, 2004) in case students did not attend. This proved to be a successful approach with College A as eleven female students turned up for one focus group meeting (although there was a sampling error though, as two of the eleven female students were not in their final year) and thirteen for the other (one more than expected). However, the two focus groups for Sultan Qaboos University were smaller with only four female students and nine male students. It transpired that the week of the focus group meetings coincided with a university “Business Week” initiative which meant that a number of students were engaged in other projects. The “representativeness” of the sample would also have been affected by the fact that probably only those students willing to actively engage in a discussion on their transition context would have attended.

<b>Focus group</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>B</b>	<b>C</b>	<b>D</b>
<b>Date</b>	28 March 2011	28 March 2011	18 April 2011	18 April 2011
<b>Time</b>	2.30 – 3.30	3.30 – 4.30	2.30 – 3.30	3.30 – 4.30
<b>Institution</b>	College A	College A	Sultan Qaboos University	Sultan Qaboos University
<b>Gender</b>	Female	Male	Female	Male
<b>Number of participants</b>	11	13	4	9
<b>Average age</b>	19.8	22.5	21	22.8
<b>Recorded?</b>	Yes	Yes	No	Yes

**Table 4** Focus groups profile

### 3.4.2 Self-completion questionnaires

For the self-completion questionnaires, the sample frame was limited by the number of students fitting the stratifying criteria in each of the four institutions which had agreed to participate. The pilot questionnaire was carried out with a group of final year students at a government tourism college. Each gatekeeper was given enough questionnaires for the cohort profile and a convenience sampling approach (Bryman, 2004) enabled a reasonable response rate. There was a lack of consistency in how the questionnaires were distributed which may have had an impact on the response rate (and potentially on the motivation of the respondents): College B and SQU gatekeepers distributed the questionnaires during class time and College A and College C gatekeepers asked students to collect questionnaires from the administrative offices. A number of the questionnaires from College A and College C were completed by respondents over the age of 25 and these were not included in the data analysis. These considerations may have implications for the generalisability of my findings.

	College X (pilot)		College A		College B		College C		Sultan Qaboos University	
<b>Total population<sup>11</sup></b>	53		105		83		82		473	
<b>Total distributed</b>	20		75		75		75		200	
<b>Total completed</b>	18		45		67		55		156	
<b>Total useable</b>	17		31		57		35		151	
	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>F</i>
	3	14	10	21	25	32	11	24	63	88

**Table 5** Questionnaire sample profile

<sup>11</sup> Total population of full-time Omani students in final year on a business-related programme aged 25 or below

### 3.5 Research instrument: focus groups

Focus groups were chosen as a qualitative research instrument as they provided an open-ended discussion environment in which students could express their views on opportunities and constraints in their transition context. Research with graduating students provides an opportunity to capture their perceptions at a specific point in time during their transition journey:

*Since social actors are embedded within many such temporalities at once, they can be said to be oriented toward the past, the future, and the present at any given moment, although they may be primarily oriented toward one or another of these within any one emergent situation (Emirbayer and Misch, 1998, p.964)*

Focus groups allow participants' perspectives to be shared in ways that are different from individual interviews, for example through participants responding to each others' contributions (Bryman, 2004). Group discussions provide a social context for research; an opportunity to explore how people think and talk about a topic and how their ideas are moderated in conversation with others. Patton suggests that focus group interviews are an efficient qualitative data collection technique with their own embedded quality controls: "participants tend to provide checks and balances on each other which weeds out false or extreme views. The extent to which there is a relatively consistent, shared view can be quickly assessed" (2002:386). However, the emergence of a "shared view" could also be considered a limitation as there may be instances of 'groupthink' (Thomas, 2008) where participants decide to share a point of view to avoid disagreement



although individually their opinion may differ. According to Morgan and Kreuger (1993), there are four situations in which focus groups could be useful: situations where there may be power differentials; where policy issues are important and there may be gap between the realities of those involved; for the investigation of complex behaviour; and where a friendly research setting is appropriate. Focus groups are also one environment in which to devise areas of questioning for a statistical study; qualitative methods can help to define terminology and identifying themes and constructs, especially for looking at areas such as attitudes and behaviours and help to identify variables for inclusion in the statistical study (Ritchie and Lewis, 2003). For the purposes of this research, focus groups were used to identify or confirm key themes before engaging in quantitative data collection.

Little use has been made of focus groups as a qualitative research instrument in the Gulf region. Thomas (2008) suggests that although the use of focus groups may be associated with a research paradigm derived from 'Western values', they "allow for cultural values and behaviours of the researched to have 'breathing space'" (2008:87). Characteristics of focus groups such as 'in-group membership', consultation and discursive communication style can be seen to align with key aspects and behaviour within an Arab cultural setting. However, Thomas also highlights the importance of the researcher recognising their own subjectivity and ethnocentrism in the process. Bryman (2004) notes that among the limitations of focus groups is the fact that the researcher has less control over the proceedings; and when carrying out a number of meetings, the degree of control of the moderator may vary. The focus group meeting can generate a lot

of data and it is not always easy to capture the patterns of interaction. There may also be issues with dominant and reticent participants and participants may be more prone to expressing culturally expected views than in individual interviews.

### 3.5.1 Developing the focus group meeting schedule

Key themes to be covered and guiding questions for the focus groups were decided on in advance based on a review of the relevant literature (see meeting schedule in Appendix B). Although the objective of the focus groups was to capture student views in a relatively open-ended discussion, the questions were developed to provide guidance for the sessions and to ensure a certain degree of consistency in the general themes covered across the four groups. I also had to consider the validity of the data generated (i.e. have I gained full access to the knowledge and meanings of informants?) and the reliability of the data (i.e. would similar observations be made by different researchers on different occasions?). The schedule also ensured that findings could be analysed and compared following the meetings. The topics were based on transition themes highlighted in international and regional literature relevant to the focus of this research: student views on government policies which had an impact on their transition context, such as Omanisation (Al Lamki, 1998); reasons for choosing their areas of study and future plans (Evans et al, 2001; Tomlinson, 2007); views on finding a job (Evans et al, 2001; Nasser and Abouchdid, 2006); and views on working in the private versus public sector (Al Lamki, 1998; Roberts, 2003; Silver, 2007; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010). Three themes raised by the first focus group were then included in the interview schedule with the other three groups:

work experience prior to finding a first job; the perception of Omani employees in the workplace and the 2011 protests.

The focus groups were given an outline of the type of questions that would be discussed in the introduction letter (see Appendix A). Prospective participants were invited to contact me if they required any further information about the meetings; one email was received from a male SQU student expressing his interest in the topics under discussion.

### 3.5.2 Focus group meetings

Four focus groups were set up in March and April 2011: two (one male, one female) with undergraduates studying in a private university college in Muscat and two (one male, one female) with undergraduates studying at SQU (see **Table 4 and Appendix C**). Although final year undergraduates in business-related disciplines were invited to attend, in practice the focus groups in the university college were not all in their final year of study. As one of the aims of using focus groups was on promoting interaction between participants and the moderator, the discussions took place in English with an Omani bilingual interpreter (not a member of staff of the institution) to support students if they wished to express their views in Arabic. In fact, the majority of the discussions were held in English (the language of instruction in higher education in Oman), although there were some short discussions which took place in Arabic in the university college groups, which were translated from the recording following the focus group meeting. The discussions where students broke into Arabic tended to be more animated and argumentative; in both groups the topics of these discussions were anecdotal, focusing on experiences in education and relatives'

experiences of job search. In retrospect, carrying out focus groups in Arabic may have generated more interaction and intra-group discussion; nevertheless, the resulting transcripts showed that the focus group discussions in English generated a rich data stream (see section 3.5.3).

Each meeting lasted around one hour. Female and male students were interviewed separately as I had found from empirical experience teaching in Oman that mixed sex groups could be inhibiting. The objective of the meeting was reiterated at the beginning of each session by the interpreter so that those not interested in contributing (or being recorded) could leave; participants were also informed that no comments would be attributed to any one individual and although I requested some personal information about the attendees, no names were given. The meetings took place in a private meeting room (not a teaching venue) in each institution after students had finished classes. The intention was to record all the focus groups (not video because of cultural sensitivity for some female students) for two main reasons: firstly as a record of the discussion and secondly, to double check the interpreter's translation where Arabic was used. In practice, however, three of the four meetings were successfully recorded as there were technical difficulties with the equipment during the meeting with the female student focus group at SQU (Group C – see **Table 4**). In all interviews I had taken the precaution of taking contemporaneous notes by hand to provide a summary of the discussion in case the recording equipment did not work. As Group C was small with only four participants, key themes were still able to be identified and relevant quotes were captured. At the beginning of each focus group meeting I drew a diagram with numbers for students and a rough indication

of who was speaking when to help identify the speakers for the transcription. However, in practice identifying the students while transcribing the discussion was a challenge.

As Thomas (2008) observes, focus group interaction can vary from relatively structured (more akin to a group interview) with significant control from the moderator to meetings where participants interact relatively freely with little interjection from the moderator. The four focus group meetings ranged from fairly structured with the moderator clearly guiding the direction of the discussions (groups A and B) to a freer discussion (with Group C). The structured nature of some of the group discussions may have been down to the formal institutional setting where the students were used to having someone lead the discussion and/or the fact that they were communicating in a foreign language or were with an unfamiliar group of peers. I was aware of my role in controlling the discussion and perhaps moved the students on before themes were fully explored. The potential for the moderator to disrupt interaction has been pointed out by Morgan (1996) and may mean that the qualitative nature of the data is limited. Groups D and C were more relaxed discussions, partly because we were in a more informal environment (a postgraduate student lounge) and perhaps because the groups were smaller. Overall there were limited interactions between the participants themselves, apart from when Groups A and B broke into Arabic. There was limited overlapping or interrupting of each other and a clear sense of turn taking. There were some dominant students in the groups who needed a certain degree of 'handling' and reticent participants were encouraged to contribute. Probing questions were used to

explore and/or clarify themes that were raised. This was limited as it tended to lead to a one on one discussion between me (moderator) and a single participant with the potential for others to feel disengaged. However, the atmosphere in all four groups was positive, collegiate and students were, on the whole, keen to contribute to the discussion.

### 3.5.3 Analysis of focus group data

The focus groups were primarily exploratory in order to develop an understanding of what students saw as the opportunities and constraints of the transition context and the influence of structural factors. The focus group data was analysed using thematic content analysis (Wilkinson, 2004; CLMS, 2002). Although I was aware of software packages to analyse qualitative data (such as Nvivo and Weft), I decided to analyse the data manually to firstly ensure that I was thoroughly familiar with it and to allow my own cognitive processes to work with the findings. First, all three focus group meetings that had been successfully recorded were transcribed verbatim (apart from the short discussions in Arabic) and printed versions were used to become familiar with the data. The discussion held with the group that was not recorded was written up from my notes. As the group was small and no Arabic used, it was possible to capture specific quotations. In the interests of validity or “trustworthiness” of the data (Morse *et al*, 2002), I showed the transcripts to the interpreter who was present during the focus group meetings. Although she could not be expected to remember the content of all the discussions that took place, she agreed that overall the transcripts were an accurate representation of what took place. The interpreter translated the Arabic passages from the recorded discussions; these were

incorporated into the transcripts and later verified by listening to the recording with another bilingual speaker.

The unit of analysis was the participants' utterances, which provided the basis for the coding system (Wilkinson, 2002). Important words or phrases which were associated with the themes or new areas not previously considered were identified and these utterances were colour coded according to which theme they related to (see Appendix D). This iterative content analysis process was systematically applied across all the transcripts. This continued to saturation point when no further themes could be drawn from the transcripts. One observation in carrying out the analysis of the focus group data was the importance of the whole context; once utterances were taken out of the conversational context they were open to interpretation and it was important to go back to the original transcript to ensure the intended meaning was captured. Once all the themes had been identified, there then followed a period of broader reflection in order to consider overall patterns in terms of interaction during the focus group meetings and the extent to which I may have influenced the findings either through my role as moderator or the extent to which my own subjectivity could have informed and influenced the selection of utterances and themes. As mentioned in section 3.5.2, I was aware that my moderation varied in the four groups, but on re-reading the transcripts believe that my approach to generating rich data was not compromised. The findings of the focus group are considered in chapter four.

### 3.6 Research instrument: self-completion questionnaires

One of the limitations of focus groups is the extent to which data can be generalized or seen as representative of a wider population (Morgan, 1996). As indicated in section 3.2, the focus groups were used for exploratory processes and a follow up paper-based self-completion questionnaire was developed to discover how widely views expressed on the transition context in Oman were held. Questionnaires are better to able to “elicit yes/no answers about specific behaviours and experiences” (Morgan, 1996:137) and generate significant quantitative data on a limited number of themes.

A questionnaire or survey has been described as any work that collects data in the form of cases, variables and attributes on those variables (de Vaus, 1996). Bryman more specifically describes survey research as:

*“a cross-sectional design in relation to which data are collected predominantly by questionnaire or by structured interview on more than one case and at a single point in time to collect a body of quantitative or quantifiable data in connection with two or more variables which are then examined to determine patterns of association” (2004:43).*

Survey research does not automatically link to either a positivist or interpretative perspective; the epistemological stance will be reflected in whether the results are used for theory testing or theory developing. In the case of this research, questionnaires have been used for validity and complementary purposes.



There was a time lapse – just over a year – between the focus groups being held and the questionnaire being developed and distributed. This was in part due to limited access to students because of the academic calendar but also due to an implicit nervousness amongst managers in higher education institutions (HEIs) in Muscat allowing external researchers following a wave of protests from students in the second half of 2011.

### 3.6.1 Developing the questionnaire

Following the thematic analysis of the data generated by the focus groups, the self-completion questionnaire was developed to explore views on structural factors, motivating factors, opportunities and constraints in the transition context. The link between the themes explored in the focus groups and the questionnaire is outlined in Appendix E. The questionnaire also provided an opportunity to consider to what extent opinions expressed in the focus groups were widely held, such as the importance of work experience for job seekers and perceptions of Omanis in the workplace. As the notion of personal agency came up in the analysis of focus group data (such as evidence of planning and evidence of own efforts) and through further consideration of the literature in line with this research focus (Heinz, 2009; Walther, 2006; Evans, 2001) indicators of agency were included in the questionnaire. Concepts, such as agency, that do not exist in an observable sense can be measured by using proxy measures or indicators which correspond to the components of the concept or construct (Welling, 2002). If a concept is to be explored in a quantitative research context then it needs to be measured; indicators can be used in the form of dependent or independent

variables. This measurement enables the delineation of differences and the establishment of the degree of relationship between concepts and variables.

The questionnaire (see Appendix F) was organised into the following sections:

- A     You as a student
- B     Your present situation
- C     Your plans
- D     Your views
- E     About you

In section A, respondents were asked for information about themselves that was primarily study related, such as their educational background; the type of school they went to; the type of accommodation they currently lived in; and who paid for their studies. This data provided background information about the respondents and although this provided information on a range of variables, these variables were not all used in the final analysis of the data. Section B question 1 was a multivariate question where respondents were asked to tick all the reasons for choosing their particular field of study. The options included were chosen for a number of reasons: firstly, to serve as proxies to indicate the extent to which respondents showed forethought (Bandura, 2008; Woolley, 2005) and planning (or lack of it); secondly, to indicate whether or not respondents showed a preference for working in the government or private sector or starting their own business, especially as those studying on business-related programmes were usually employed in the public sector (Al Lamki, 1998); and thirdly to have an

idea of the extent to which these students were motivated to study the area chosen. Section B also included questions on length of period of study (to ensure that the respondent met the sampling conditions) and the expected exit qualification.

Section C1 asked respondents to choose their intended job search strategies to explore any correlation with the findings of Oman's Graduate Student Survey (Ministry of Higher Education, 2010) and Nasser and Abouchedid's (2006) research. It also had the more generic purpose of exploring forethought and plans. Section C2 included a range of proxies for exploring motivating factors, based on the contributions from the focus groups and the questions that Al Lamki (1998) used in her research and section C3 focused on long term plans and students' views on their future prospects (Woolley, 2005; Evans *et al*, 2001). Section D1 included 26 statements with a forced choice Likert-type scale in order to ascertain respondents' views on the influence of a number of different structural factors, such as the role of government and employers (based on Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2010; Al Lamki, 1998), and other aspects of the transition context, some of which were raised in the focus group discussions. Other statements included proxies to explore indicators of agency such as students' ability to recognise their own strengths and weaknesses and planning ahead (Woolley, 2005) (see Appendix E). An understanding of the job search context was the basis for the statements included in section D2, which included references to the themes raised in the focus groups (such as *wasta*) and was also based on Al Barwany *et al*'s (2009) research studies. The first part of section E focused on information about individual respondents, seeking personal

information such as gender (one of the main variables to be used in the analysis of the findings), age and parents' occupations which were left as open answers. On reflection it would have been better to have given respondents a number of categories of employment from which to choose as the lack of consistency in the range of answers given on parents' employment made coherent analysis difficult. Section E2 entitled 'How would you describe yourself' included fifteen statements with forced-choice responses on a four-point Likert-type scale. These proxies were intended to indicate the extent to which students practiced self-reflexivity and how confident they were (Yorke and Knight, 2007; Woolley, 2005). However, survey instruments such as Likert-type scales may not be equally effective in all cultural contexts: individuals from 'collectivist' cultures have been found to favour selecting the 'middle' option whether or not this represented their views (Buda and Elsayed-Elkhouly, 1998). I avoided an odd number of choices and respondents were invited to leave the response blank if they had no view rather than include a central neither agree or disagree option.

Concepts are the linchpins in social research: *"quite clearly, a different conceptual starting point leads to very different operational outcomes and thus different measurements"* (Harvey, 2001:98). Unlike in focus groups, with questionnaires it is not possible to provide further clarification of concepts if there is any confusion. Therefore the questionnaire was developed in English and translated into Arabic (verified through use of back translation) in order to ensure concepts used were as unambiguous as possible. However, questionnaires may present semantic and language difficulties (Harzig, 2005), despite techniques such as back translation to ensure linguistic validity. Earlier research carried out

in Oman (using self-completion questionnaires) highlighted the potential linguistic difficulties encountered during research, for example loss of meaning or potential misunderstanding when using translation for questions and answers (Aycan et al, 2007). In the questionnaire the Arabic version of the questions was on the right hand side of page and English on the left so as to correspond with natural reading approaches. Care was taken with formatting to ensure that the instructions were repeated for each question to reduce apprehension of what the respondents had to do.

The decision to use a paper-based survey questionnaire rather than an on-line was based on feedback from the gatekeepers in the institutions that computer-based surveys had a lower response rate amongst Omani students. Questionnaires being distributed by staff working in the institution offered both advantages and disadvantages. One of the advantages was logistical and may have ensured a higher response rate than if they had not been involved; however, the disadvantage was that the students may have associated this questionnaire with other surveys instruments used in the institution for feedback purposes and this may have had a social desirability impact on responses.

### 3.6.2 Testing/Piloting the questionnaire

The questionnaire was piloted with a group of final year tourism students at a higher education institution not included in the final sample. The questionnaire included a cover page (in English and Arabic) which indicated the purpose of the research and assured anonymity. It was agreed with the institution that the data generated would not be included in the data analysis. The gatekeeper involved was asked to direct the students to completing the feedback questions once they

had completed the main part of the questionnaire. Students were asked to indicate whether the questionnaire was understandable and easy to fill in; if the time allocated was sufficient; if there were any difficulties with comprehension and whether having the questions in English and Arabic was helpful; and an open-ended question asking for suggestions on how the questionnaire could be improved. Of the 18 completed questionnaires returned there were no suggestions for changes. However, in the piloted questionnaire a scale of 1 – 4 was included to represent the range of answers from agree – slightly agree – slightly disagree – disagree. Tippexed over answers indicated this was potentially confusing. In the final version of the questionnaire, the scale was changed to A – SA – SD – D. Section A of the questionnaire, “Your background” was changed to “You as a student” as it more accurately represented the content of the section, focusing the respondent on their status as student in completing the questionnaire. A few other minor changes were made, primarily to provide a greater range of choices in responses, such as “I don’t know” and “I’m not interested in finding a job’ in response to question C1 “How do you plan to find a job?” and “no particular reason” to B1 “Why did you choose to study in this field?”. Some of the questions were slightly reworded so that they could be translated more clearly into Arabic. The sampling approach and distribution of the questionnaire is discussed in section 3.4.2.

### 3.6.3 Analysis of questionnaire data

**Table 5** in section 3.4 and Appendix G contain data regarding the questionnaire sample. Of the total 425 questionnaires distributed, 323 (76%) were completed. Questionnaires were initially sifted to ensure that the respondents met the sampling criteria. From the total number of questionnaires completed 274 (85%)

were useable. The majority of the respondents who had completed the unused questionnaires were older than 25 years old and therefore outside the sample range.

Data from the questionnaires from each higher education institution were entered into an Excel spreadsheet, with one worksheet for open ended questions which were coded (such as type of school and funding) and another worksheet for statistical data. All data entered was verified by two other people to ensure accuracy of data input against the questionnaires. Results data can be found in Appendix H. The full profile of the respondents can be found in Appendix G.

#### 3.6.4 Limitations of research methodology

There were a number of limitations with regard to the research methodology. First, as stated above, the higher education institutions involved were all based in Muscat. While some of the participants and respondents were from outside Muscat, they were all familiar with studying and living in the metropolitan area; therefore their views may not correlate with the views of students studying in different parts of Oman. The research only targeted students studying on business-related programmes. Although these make up the largest proportion of programmes offered in Oman (Carroll, 2007), the focused range of students has implications for the generalisation of these findings. There are also limitations with regard to the use of convenience sampling; although it meant that a reasonable percentage of questionnaires was returned, this approach lacks statistical rigour (Bryman, 2004).

One of the limitations of using focus groups was the question of whether the sample was representative of the target population. As can be seen from the focus group profile (Appendix C), the participants met the criteria that were given to the gatekeepers. However, all the participants were volunteers and may therefore have had a positive disposition in being willing to talk about their education to work transition and Omanisation. Those not willing to participate may have had very different views. There was also the issue of the small number of female students attending the meeting at SQU and that session not being recorded.

As mentioned above, the interaction and the dynamic of the four different focus groups varied, with the larger groups at College A being more like a group interview. The moderator's role also differed which may have had an impact on participants being willing to interact with each other. Although the meetings did not take place in a classroom, the students were still in the College. The presence of the interpreter did not seem to impede the proceedings but on reflection the focus groups may have been more interactive had they been carried out in Arabic.

There was a year's time lag between the focus groups and the distribution of the questionnaire. This was in part down to the nature of the academic calendar and exam periods but also because a number of institutions were sensitive to an undercurrent of restlessness following the protests in 2011 and were not keen to accommodate external research at that time. While the focus groups generated a number of themes that were included in the questionnaire, it was not possible



to go back to the focus group participants to verify the nature of the discussions (although the interpreter was helpful in this regard). It would have been useful to explore the experience of exercising agency with the focus groups more explicitly. I was unable to ascertain as to how many of the focus group participants also completed the questionnaire. Entering and analysing the data from the questionnaire results made it evident that the layout of the questionnaire was more complicated than it needed to be. The questionnaire was perhaps ambitious as there were a number of possible variables that were collected but not used in the data analysis, such as size of family and parents' occupation (see Appendix G). I also have to consider whether validity of data provided through questionnaires was hampered by factors such as social desirability whereby respondents answer with a desire to present themselves in the most favourable way (Dijkstra *et al*, 2001).

## **CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings from the data generated by focus groups and self-completion questionnaires which are analysed in relation to the research objectives and, where relevant, in relation to the review of the literature. As noted in chapter three, a number of themes were identified prior to and following the focus group meetings and these have provided the basis for the organisation of this chapter. One of the main objectives of this research was to explore students' perceptions on the influence of structural factors in their education to work transition context; these have been divided into the role of government; the labour market; education; gender; and socio-cultural factors. Key motivating factors, job search strategies and indicators of agency are included in the section on the individual in the transition context.

Rather than looking at the findings of the focus groups and questionnaires separately, the analysis of both sets of data is presented here within the key themes (see Appendix E for the relationship between the themes explored in the focus group and the questionnaire statements). This approach was adopted in order to highlight correlation and/or complementarity in the findings generated by the two research instruments. The focus groups extracts included below were chosen because, in my view, they were illustrative of a typical or well put point in relation to the topic under discussion (Mason, 2006). An effort has also been made to include a spread of responses from all four focus groups. Questionnaire data referred to were based on the spreadsheet analysis (see Appendix H) and

where there were particular points of interest or patterns, data are presented in histograms. Overall conclusions about the findings are included in chapter five.

## **4.2 Perceived influence of structural factors in Oman**

As discussed in chapter two, structural factors such as government, policies, economic environment, gender and families have an important role in shaping youth transitions (Roberts, 2009; Walther, 2006; Evans et al, 2001). This study aimed to explore how students saw these; the extent to which they presented opportunities or constraints; and the impact they had on how students viewed their transition context. The structural factors included in this section were derived from the focus group meeting schedule (the government, Omanisation, constraints from the labour market); further topics raised in the focus group discussions (such as education and *wasta*); and other factors referred to in the questionnaire following a consideration of the focus group data and further review of the literature.

### **4.2.1 The role of government**

As noted in chapter two, literature focusing on the labour market in the GCC region purports that as part of the hypothetical Arab 'social contract', young people have had a long-held expectation that the government will be the principal provider of employment through public sector positions (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010, Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008; Yousef, 2004). The government is therefore seen as exerting a significant influence on the education to work transition context. The findings of Al Lamki's (1998) Oman-based research supported the belief that graduating students' first preference was for

employment in the public sector, findings recently reinforced by research carried out with graduating students in the UAE by Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2012).

The perceived role of the Omani government in influencing the opportunities for employment was explored with all four focus groups. The government was seen as having a key role in facilitating students' transition from education to work, with a typical comment being:

*...the government is responsible for the young students, for the young graduates<sup>12</sup>(SQU male student)*

Students' perceptions of the government as the key provider of employment were also explored in the self-completion questionnaire. Looking specifically at the responses to the statement "the government should provide jobs for all graduates" (see **Table 6**), the majority of total respondents (73%) agreed that the government should provide jobs for all graduates (D1b<sup>13</sup>), with 17.5% slightly agreeing. A greater number of total female students agreed (78%) compared to total male students (66%) and higher percentage (81%) of total number of students attending non-government HEIs agreed in contrast to 67% of the total number of students attending SQU.

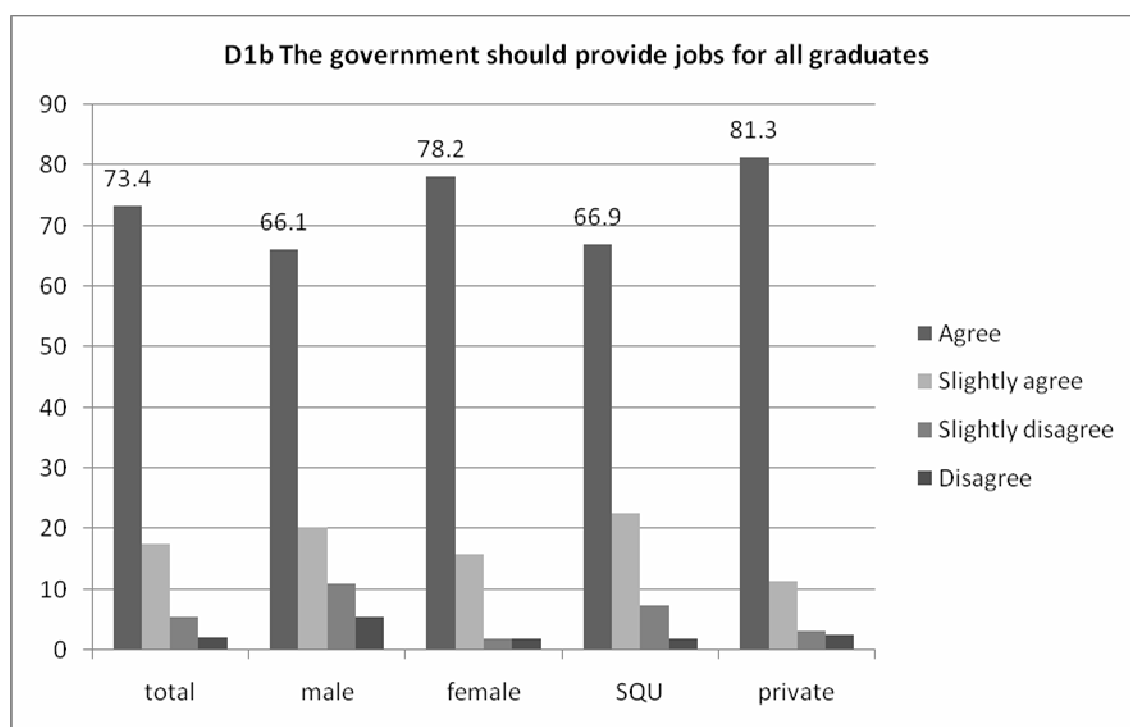
Although this would seem to indicate that there is still a significant dependence on government sector employment (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner 2012; Harry

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<sup>12</sup> Please note that all students' contributions are taken directly from either the transcripts of the recorded meetings or, in the case of the SQU female participants, from the written notes; I have deliberately avoided the use of *sic* as it may interfere with the reading of the text.

<sup>13</sup> For questions and statements used in the questionnaire refer to APPENDIX F Copy of questionnaire

2007; Al Lamki, 1998), the focus group discussions suggested that the government is seen as being responsible for supporting the provision of employment in the private as well as the public sector, primarily through the implementation of its Omanisation policies.



**Table 6** Questionnaire results for questionnaire statement D1b

While the government is clearly seen as having an important role to play in the education to work transition context, there was a brief discussion amongst focus group participants on what sparked the 2011 protests:

[Reason for protests] *Because of unemployment. The first reason was the unemployment. The second was the idea about the corruption in the government. (SQU male student)*

For the notion of an Arab social contract to work, there needs to be an underpinning of trust; citizens need to believe the government acts in their best interests, otherwise the citizens themselves need to be given a greater say (World Bank, 2004). Lack of transparency can lead to suspicion and dissatisfaction with how resources are allocated:

*[There needs to be] transparency in knowing the resources of the country, this is really important because people have a perception about how huge are the resources (SQU male student)*

*Things need to be changed...a small portion of people have the power, the political power (SQU female student)*

As mentioned above, one of the mechanisms the government has used to promote employment amongst nationals is the policy of Omanisation.

### *Omanisation*

Omanisation was recognised by focus group participants as being a driving force for opening up opportunities for Omanis to find work in the private sector and reducing dependence on expatriate employees. The majority of participants saw Omanisation as a positive initiative, not only in its potential for providing jobs but also in building Oman as a nation (Valeri, 2009):

*Also I think Omanisation will get the government and get the people of the country their power...the power of being in control of their*

*companies, in control of their organisations (College A male student)*

For Omanisation to be successful, however, a number of respondents indicated that it would only work with government intervention:

*If you leave it to the private sector, the private sector will do nothing so the government needs to intervene (SQU male student)*

*...but here in Oman I think now everybody is looking for the government as the only employer in the country I think the private sector should be forced or be some rules to give him...to force him to give the Omani a chance to work (SQU male student)*

This view would suggest that Omanisation is seen an extension of the government's control of the transition context, extending public sector-type jobs to the private sector (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010) rather than a competitive, private sector employer-driven labour market. Government-decreed hiring and firing policies in the private sector were seen as potential barrier for budding entrepreneurs:

*My uncle has a company and his [Omani] workers doesn't work and he can't fire them...and he is losing money because those people doesn't work...so he lose he can't say you're fired or the*

*government will come to him and how can you fire an Omani you have to have Omanis (College A male student)*

Discussion on the Omanisation quota system (Al Lamki, 2000), provided anecdotes whereby private sector employers “fiddled” Omanisation rates (Mashood et al, 2009; Valeri, 2009) by paying Omanis 40 OMR<sup>14</sup> a week to have their names on the books without actually being given a job:

*Many organisations...I know someone who had a construction organisation he just hired his children, his son, only to get the requirement percentages for Omanis (SQU male student)*

There were other criticisms of Omanisation. Not all respondents saw Omanisation as ensuring competent people were recruited. As Valeri (2009) points out, Omanisation has been perceived as a process of substituting expatriate employees rather than a focus on ensuring that the Omani workforce has the appropriate skills or comparative abilities with people being employed because of their nationality rather than their ability:

*Omanisation is a problem because it just focuses on hiring Omanis...hiring an Omani is not the same as hiring the best person for the job so you can hire 600 Omanis but out of those you can only have three people that are really the best people to do that job (College A male student)*

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<sup>14</sup> About £70



In the questionnaire results, overall views were split fairly evenly as to whether it was easier to find a job if you were Omani (D1n), with 19% of the total number of respondents agreeing, 31% slightly agreeing, 32% slightly disagreeing and 16% disagreeing. These findings would indicate that future jobseekers are not convinced that the affirmative action in terms of encouraging employers to recruit Omanis is necessarily an advantage. The Omanisation objective of replacing expatriate workers with Omanis (D1y) was supported by respondents: nearly 40% of total number of respondents agreed that the private sector companies in Oman should replace expatriate employees with over 32% slightly agreeing. However, discussions with focus group participants suggested that it would not be in the country's interest to expel all expatriates; Oman was still seen as a developing country and would not necessarily have the human resources or expertise to replace all expatriates (World Bank, 2004).

Skills of the workforce were also raised as an issue that limited the success of Omanisation and the opportunities for young people to find employment, as in other Middle East contexts (Ezzine, 2010; Nasser and Abouchedid, 2006). However, it was seen as the government's rather than the individual's responsibility to develop the required skills:

*The government should invest in their people, in improving their skills, and maybe after that they'll replace what we have now the foreign workers, foreign employees (SQU male student)*

*Omanis...don't have...enough skill...enough skills and qualifications. I think if the government they worked on this they try to improve the people it will be no reason for the private sector to refuse them (SQU female student)*

These views suggest that, amongst focus group participants at least, the government is perceived as still having considerable influence on the transition context.

### *Entrepreneurship*

As well as having a key role in providing jobs, the government was also seen to play an important role in supporting young people to start up their own business, with nearly 70% of the total number of students agreeing that the government should be doing more in this area (statement D1u), with nearly 22% slightly agreeing. Results were similar regardless of gender or whether respondents were from SQU or private HEIs. Interestingly, nearly 40% of respondents indicated that in five year's time they envisaged working for themselves (C3g). This is in contrast to the Silatech findings (Gallup, 2009) which showed that only 10% of regionally surveyed respondents were interested in setting up their own business. The Silatech survey, however, was not exclusive to higher education students which may provide some basis for the variation in responses. Very few respondents (just under 7%) saw themselves living outside Oman (C3k), contrary to the graduate 'brain drain' predictions of Al Barwany *et al* (2009).

#### 4.2.2 The labour market

The labour market in Oman is dominated by the public/private sector divide (Valeri, 2009; Harry, 2007) which was a theme explored with focus groups and in the questionnaire. Working conditions were also explored in terms of pay, conditions, career path and training opportunities along with the potential opportunities and constraints within the workplace.

### *Private and public sector*

As indicated in the schedule (Appendix B) all focus group participants were asked whether they would prefer to find work in the government or private sector, as regional research findings would suggest that securing employment in the public sector would be the students' first choice (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2012; Boudarbat, 2008; Al Lamki, 1996). This was found not to be the case. Of the total male participants, 16 out of 22 (73%) indicated that finding work in the private sector was their first choice, with one student stating that he wanted to start his own business; 11 out of the total number of 15 (73%) female participants stated that their first preference was for finding employment in the private sector. It should be noted, however, that the focus group participants constituted a relatively small sample size. The fact that these students volunteered to come to a focus group meeting may suggest that they are particularly proactive and more inclined to be aware of the realities of future job opportunities.

The findings of the questionnaires corroborated many of the views expressed in the focus group interviews in relation to the labour market and the students' transition context. In response to the multi-choice section focusing on why

respondents chose their field of study (B1), over half of the total number of respondents indicated that they chose to study in their field as it had good job prospects in the private sector, with slightly higher (60%) amongst SQU students; 40% of the total number of students chose their field of study because it had good prospects in the government sector. This would suggest that private sector prospects have a slightly greater influence than public sector ones.

The majority of respondents (60%) either disagreed or slightly disagreed that it was easier to find a job in the government (D1d), recognising the challenge in seeking employment in the public sector. As in other transition contexts (Tomlinson, 2006), this reflects student awareness of greater competition for jobs, despite the government's pledge to provide 50,000 jobs. This may be because the majority of these positions would not require graduates, such as in the armed forces, but would target less qualified school leavers. Less than a quarter of the total respondents thought that finding a job in the government sector was important (C2v). However, of the 32 SQU respondents (21% of the total sample) who indicated this was an important factor, 75% of these were female students. These findings potentially support the premise that there is a preference for finding work in the government sector primarily amongst female jobseekers (Al Barwany and Albeely, 2008; Harry, 2007; Al Lamki, 2006; Al Belushi *et al*, 1999). Less than 25% of the total number of respondents saw themselves working for the government in five years' time (C3h), with a slightly higher response from students studying in private sector institutions (nearly 30%). However, just under 24% of total students saw themselves working in the

private sector (C3i), with a slightly higher percentage of SQU students (30%) and the total number of female and male responses about equal.

### *Pay and conditions*

Al Lamki's (1998) analysis of her study findings showed that it was not merely a question of choosing to work in the private or public sector: if the pay and conditions were the same as those in the public sector, her respondents indicated that they would be willing to join the private sector. As highlighted in the 2012 Arab Youth Survey (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2012) a good salary was seen to be of primary importance; this was a major reason for focus group participants preferring to seek a position in the private sector:

*The salaries...and the fringe benefits and everything being offered by the private sector are way better than the government (SQU male student)*

The majority of students indicated that they had chosen their field of study, such as human resources or IT, with a view to finding a job in that field in the future. Participants from all groups indicated that considerations such as private health insurance and improved retirement benefits in the private sector improved its attraction to students.

### *Nature of work*

The nature of the work itself also influenced young people's perceptions of working in the government sector. According to one female SQU student, public sector work was seen as being very "*routinised*" with a lot of bureaucracy and a lack of opportunity to develop skills. The participants in this group agreed that the private sector was seen as a more challenging working environment where individuals could pursue self-development, with the work itself being more interesting and demanding. The notion of repetitive work in a government position was reiterated by a number of students, as indicated in this typical quote:

*...also it's better to improve your experience in the private sector rather than the public sector because in the public sector you just copy your experience many times (SQU male student)*

These views were supported by the questionnaire findings which showed that over 75% of the total respondents either agreed (38.7%) or slightly agreed (36.9%) that more interesting jobs could be found in the private sector (D1s).

### *Career paths*

Although the literature suggests that students are primarily interested in securing their first job (Dhillon and Yousef, 2009), a number of focus group participants commented on the importance of opportunities for career advancement and promotion. The private sector was seen as providing more training opportunities and, as one of the female SQU students posited, a place where employees can "*show creativity*" and "*where your voice can be heard*". Typical comments included:

*Everything...the salary is more, experience is more...in private...if you work like a cleaner and from the cleaner you can become a director...in the government if you work as a cleaner you will work all your life as a cleaner (College A male student)*

*I feel that in my opinion that you are more secure in the private sector because you...they will consider you, they will promote you and put you in a focus but in the public sector they will put you in your position and that is it for how many years (College A female student)*

The issue of longer working hours and shorter holidays was raised in one of the female focus groups as a disincentive to working in the private sector, echoing Al Lamki's (1998) findings in this area. Not all students, however, saw the labour market as being a case of a choice between private sector and public sector employment:

*If you are studying what you like then you don't have to think that I will go to private or government: you're going to do what you like so you have to go anywhere (College A female student).*

### *Employer expectations*

Employer's expectations also have an influence on students' perceptions on entering the labour market (Nasser and Abouchedid, 2006). There was a sense that these future graduates had seriously considered what employers were looking for:

*Companies are not looking for a GPA<sup>15</sup>. For example in companies like Schlumberger<sup>16</sup> they interview you because they are interested in your personality. The GPA acts as a kind of screen (SQU female student)*

This was corroborated in the questionnaire with over 31% of students agreeing that employers looked for skills rather than a GPA (D1i), with nearly 33% slightly agreeing. The percentage of female and SQU students agreeing was slightly higher, with 37% and 35% respectively. However, good grades were still seen to be important (D2h) for over 58% of respondents, although slightly higher amongst those respondents studying in private sector institutions (62%) and females (61%) compared to those studying at SQU (56%) and the total number of male students (54%).

Focus group participants also identified a number of barriers to successfully finding work, one of which was the question of language skills. Although the official language of Oman is Arabic, used in most public sector working environments, the majority of the private sector organisations operate in English,

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<sup>15</sup> Grade Point Average

<sup>16</sup> Multinational company working in the oil and gas sector



partly due to the multinational workforce and partly down to the fact that many businesses operate beyond the borders of the country:

*...the problem is in the private sector most of the work is done in English...if you go to ...companies all the jobs are done in English so you'll have to speak it (College A female student)*

As in other transition contexts (Ryan, 1999), another barrier to successfully finding work in the private sector labour market was requirement for young graduates to have work experience as well as a degree, as seen in a number of the job advertisements in the local press. This was an issue raised in all four of the focus groups:

*I think that many people graduated from university and they've got no jobs because no-one agrees to take them without experience (College A female student)*

Although many students took on summer placements, focus group participants felt that employers did not view this as 'proper' work experience. The potentially conflicting perceptions of the demand side (employers) and supply side (future employees) is not exclusive to Oman, as Tomlinson's (2007) research with UK undergraduates would suggest. Although the rationale behind employers requiring experience was not an area discussed, a number of focus group participants saw the government as having a key role to play in legislating against the need for experience:

*But what we really need a law from [Ministry of] Manpower saying that no company should ask for experience... A law written in paper you should not ask an employee for a job of that experience*  
(College A male student)

In the questionnaire results, nearly 85% of total respondents either agreed (56%) or slightly agreed (28.5%) that new graduates should be able to secure a job without experience (D11), with similar results regardless of gender or government/private higher education institution. Over 70% of total respondents indicated that work experience was an important factor for finding a job.

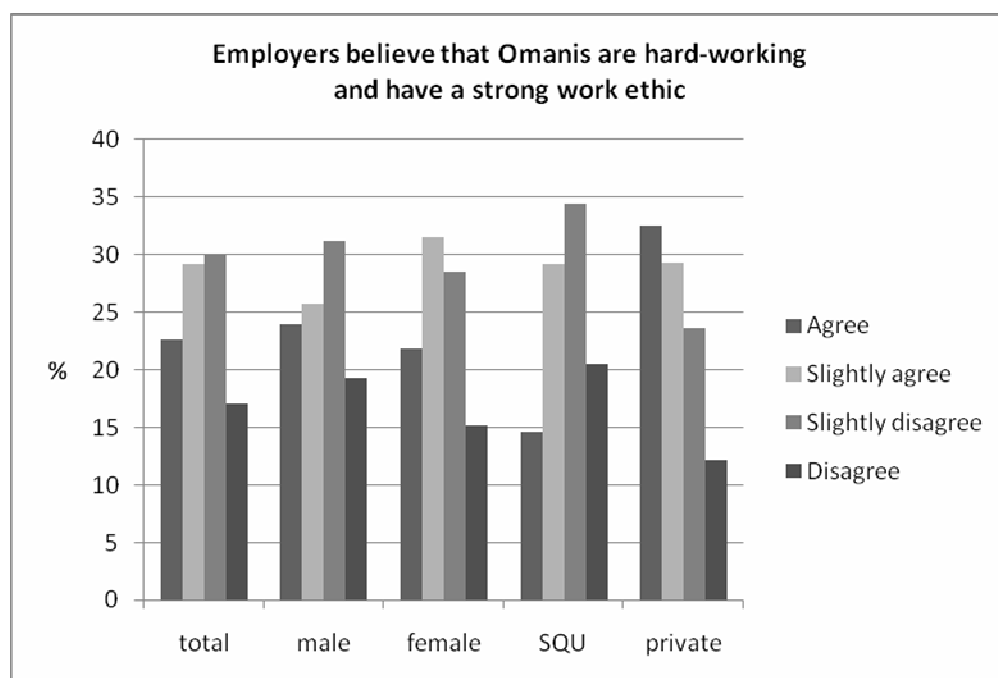
### *Negative stereotypes*

Separate research carried out by Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner (2010) and Rees (2007) showed that perceived negative stereotypes of UAE nationals (such as being underproductive and lacking key skills) was a barrier to entry into the labour market. A similar reputation of Omanis in the workplace was seen by focus group participants as inhibiting job opportunities, an issue which stimulated heated debate in the meetings with male students, illustrated by this quote:

*It happened with me when I done my internship...the manager when I finished my internship he just said in my case you're not supposed to be Omani, you're very smart...imagine he just said that. His perception of Omanis is that they are just sitting late and*

*they don't do anything and they argue that you have to pay me more (SQU male student)*

This highlighted an area to be explored with a wider population. The statement “*employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic*” (D1o) was included in the questionnaire for correlation with the issues raised in the focus groups and based on research carried out on the Islamic work ethic (Ali, 2001). There was a split in the responses to this statement (see **Table 7**). While 23% of the total number of respondents agreed and nearly 30% slightly agreed, 30% slightly disagreed with the statement with 17% disagreeing. The female/male scores and the private/SQU scores reflected the total figures. Twenty-six respondents left their response to this statement blank (9.5% of the total) indicating they neither agreed nor disagreed with this. These results suggest that there is either a lack of awareness of how employers view Omani employees or a lack of agreement with the idea that Omanis should be seen in a negative light.



**Table 7** Questionnaire results for questionnaire statement D10

#### 4.2.3 Education

As indicated in the literature review (section 2.4.3) education is one of the key structural factors that can shape the transition context (Roberts, 2006; Evans 2001).

##### *School education*

The challenges facing education, particularly school education, were raised unprompted in all four focus group discussions and was the subject of a debate in Arabic with the College A group of female students. The key issue was seen to be one of standards and government-funded education failing to serve the needs of students entering higher education, unlike students graduating from private schools. The discussion that ensued is worth noting verbatim<sup>17</sup>:

<sup>17</sup> The exchange was translated into English from the Arabic on the recording and then the translation was checked against the recording with another bilingual speaker

*S11: They should make a comparison between schools in Oman and leave alone the private schools. Take the Indian Schools, for example, they studied Oracle but us, they gave us a big heavy book which has thing like 'What is the definition of a mouse?'*

*[Students laughing: all the government schools are like that]*

*S11: I was with her [indicating the student who had attended the Indian School]. She just mentioned that she had taken Oracle in school and I was shocked...they took it in school and us, we're just learning this now...what can't our schools do the same? There are no good teachers in school.*

*S10: I tell you that the good thing is that the Omanis finally spoke about this issue.*

*S11: So the education has been here for 40 years and they just discovered that? Now they just discovered what a failure our education system is?*

*S10: Who do you think would have the guts to mention such a thing in the past? Times have changed. In the past we couldn't talk about this but now we can. (College A female students (originally in Arabic))*

What this example exchange indicates is that, for students in this focus group, there is a sense that the doors have been opened for criticism of the structural factors in place although it is unclear at this point how these views could be channeled into a force for change. As noted in section 3.7, holding the focus group discussions in English may have restricted fuller discussion of topics.

### *Qualifications*

The majority of focus group participants acknowledged that having qualifications was now a significant factor in being eligible for employment whether in the public or private sector. In response to the question why study for a degree, one of the female students stated:

*Because we need it. We need it. We need to work we need to have such things, we need to be educated and Oman needs it*  
*(College A female student)*

Having the right qualification (D2m) was seen as important for finding a job for over 50% of the total questionnaire respondents but the subject a person studied (D2j) was seen as more important, with over 73% of respondents overall selecting this. However, only 54% indicated that a link to their studies (C2w) was important to them when looking for a job. Over 60% of students agreed and 22% slightly agreed that they were studying their chosen major to get a good job in the future (D1t), but only 51% of males agreed compared to 67% of female respondents.

Over 44% of total students agreed that their studies had prepared them for the workplace (D1a), with 36% slightly agreeing. The results showed that students studying in private sector institutions had a slightly higher percentage in agreement, with 52% agreeing with the statement. Having an opportunity to pursue higher studies was seen as relatively important when looking for a job

(C2q), with over 46% of the total number of respondents selecting this. Overall, 42% of students envisaged that they would be taking further studies in five years' time (C3b). While these findings would suggest that respondents recognised the importance of continued education, this could be because in the government sector, further qualifications have traditionally been the primary route to promotion from one grade to another (Al Lamki, 1998).

Focus group participants acknowledged that, as in other parts of the world (Roberts, 2009), students in Oman now had access to opportunities which their parents did not have and in that opportunity structures had changed significantly. However, the increase in the number of higher education opportunities meant that, in the views of some participants, that there was increased competition amongst graduates for jobs. While education was primarily seen as a positive influence in the transition context, the limited range of degree subjects on offer was seen as a barrier to students wishing to study in less traditional areas (Al Barwany *et al*, 2009; Carroll, 2007). One example was given of a male student wishing to study oceanography but as there were no programmes being offered in Oman, he enrolled on a business-related course. There was a sense of lack of alignment between what range of majors higher education institutions offered and what was required in the labour market:

*I mean the education has to be enhanced... Maybe the problem is with some majors...because some students have to take some modules but this major is not suitable for the market place (SQU male student)*

To what extent does the institution that young people study at make a difference?  
In both focus groups with female students, graduating from SQU was seen as offering a distinct advantage:

*SQU is seen as a sign of quality, employers are more confident so*

*SQU has an advantage above the rest (SQU female student)*

*The trouble is with the private sector mostly when you go to apply*

*for jobs they just want SQU graduates and not others (College A*

*College female student)*

Over half of the total questionnaire respondents indicated that the institution an individual studied in had an impact on finding a job (D2c), with 45% of students attending a private higher education institution indicating this was an important factor compared to 65% of SQU students, suggesting an awareness that having a qualification from SQU was seen as offering a premium in the job search stakes. However, only 22% of the total number of respondents chose to study in their institution (B1h). This may be down to the fact that SQU places are only offered to students who are the highest achievers in the national school leaving examination and there is fierce competition. Only 17% of students attending a private HEI chose to study in their particular institution; around 50% of students were guided by the field of study that they were interested in (B1f).



Results of research studies carried out elsewhere would suggest that higher education institutions, in particular career advisory units, have a key role to play not only developing job search skills but also in managing students' expectations (McKeown and Lindorff, 2011; Boudarbat, 2008; Ng and Burke, 2006; Nasser and Abouchdid, 2006; Perrone and Vickers, 2003). In the questionnaires, students were asked their views on whether they thought colleges and universities were doing enough to help young people find work (D1k) and whether they had had support from their institution in helping them prepare for the future (D1x). Nearly 29% of total respondents agreed and 31% slightly agreed that institutions were not doing enough to help young people find work; there were no significant differences between the views of those studying at SQU or in a private sector HEI. Only 18% of total students agreed that they had support from their College in helping them prepare for the future, with nearly 28% slightly in agreement. Over 27% of SQU students agreed and just over a third slightly agreed that they had had support from their institution compared to 21% and 26% of respondents studying in private sector HEIs respectively. 45% of SQU students indicated that they planned to find a job through a Career's Fair (C1h) (these are usually held by institutions) compared to 37% of respondents studying in the private sector. SQU has a comprehensive job skills programme and this is reflected to some extent in the fact that 71% of the total number of SQU students thought good interview skills were important in finding a job, compared to 53% of the total number of students studying in a private HEI.

#### 4.2.4 Gender

Gender is seen as having a significant impact on an individual's youth transition experience, particularly for females, not just in the Middle East region but all over the world (United Nations, 2010; Silver, 2007; Al Lamki, 2006; Furlong and Cartmel, 2006; Woolley, 2005).

The topic of female employment was raised only in the focus groups with female students, although on reflection it should have been included in the meeting schedule for all groups. Female participants in one of the SQU focus groups stated that for many female students in their cohort, enrolling on a business-related programme had not been their first choice but they had accepted the place as it meant studying at SQU rather than elsewhere. The students stated that traditionally fewer females entered the College of Commerce and Economics as it was thought that the working environment such as working for private companies, that these degrees led to was not suitable due to different cultures and mixed genders working together and longer working hours. However, the students had noticed an increase in the number of female students entering these business-related programmes as a first choice<sup>18</sup>.

Traditionally, women's key role in Oman has been seen to support the family (Al Barwany and Albeely, 2008; Al Lamki, 2006, Chatty, 2000). The results of the questionnaires suggest that only 18% of the total number of female respondents saw themselves at home raising children in five years' time (C3a) (compared to 8% of the total male respondents) whereas nearly 41% saw themselves taking

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<sup>18</sup> Data from SQU's College of Commerce and Economics indicate that there has been a slight rise in the number of females from 44% of the 2006 cohort intake to 52% of the 2010 cohort intake

further studies (C3b); 50% saw themselves in management positions (C3c) and 37% working for themselves (C3g).

Further review of the questionnaire results showed that only 1% of female respondents chose raising children as their sole activity. The perception of the shifting role of women has also been seen as one of the features of “emerging adulthood” (Tanner and Arnett, 2009). About a quarter of male and female respondents indicated that gender was a factor in finding employment (D2f), although the statement did not make it clear whether gender was a positive or negative influence. As Chatty (2000) found, Omanisation is seen as providing opportunities for females in the workplace:

*Omanisation is important for females as more females are required in jobs and this promotes equality. There were few females in the past but now there are more female workers (SQU female student)*

*Nowadays the girls are joining the business world too because of Omanisation. They know they have vacancies, they know they can work...that's why they are trying to have being educated and to have knowledge (College A female student)*

While there is a sense that there are more opportunities for females in employment, there are still restrictions:

*Guys can live away from families but here but girls can't. That's why it's difficult for female workers to move to places like Sohar<sup>19</sup>*  
*(SQU female student)*

*At our house it was a condition like study whatever you want but in Muscat only (College A female student)*

In the 2012 Arab Youth Survey (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2012) 43% of the respondents expressed concern regarding insufficient the opportunities for women. However, only 9% considered opportunities for women as a key issue which suggests that although the role of women in society is a concern for young people in the region, it is not seen as one of the biggest challenges in the survey in the wider region.

The overall questionnaire results were reviewed to see if there were any noticeable trends or differences between the female and the male responses ( $\geq 10\%$ ). There was confirmation of the premise that female students were slightly more study-orientated (Al Barwany and Albeely, 2008; Russell et al, 2005): 49% of female students compared to 38% of male students agreed that their studies prepared them for the workplace (D1a); 67% of female respondents compared to 51% males indicated that they were studying in their major to get a good job in the future (D1t); and 80% of female students compared to 62% of males indicated that finding a job depended on which subject they studied (D2j). Findings showed that 61% of females agreed that they took their studies

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<sup>19</sup> 300km north of Muscat

seriously (E6a), compared to 49% of male respondents. This difference may be down to the fact that in Oman young females have fewer opportunities to socialise away from home and that studying is seen as an acceptable alternative to household chores. However, despite their focus on studying, 37% of female respondents compared to 24% of males agreed that employers looked for skills rather than a good GPA (D1i). A higher percentage of female respondents (78%) than males (66%) agreed that the government should provide jobs of all graduates (D1b) and 73% (compared to 64% of males) agreed that the government could do more to help young people start their own business (D1u). In terms of the labour market, in response to the statement “it is easier for females to find work in the private sector” (D1f), 26% of males agreed compared to only 13% of females; the difference in views was highlighted with 28% of female respondents disagreeing compared to 14% of male respondents.

Potential lack of mobility for female students raised in the focus groups was corroborated with less than 3% of females (compared to 13% of males) indicating that they would look for employment outside Oman (C1g). Intended job search behaviour also suggested that female students were less likely to visit companies (C1j) (25% compared to 39% of males) and more likely to send out CVs (C1i) (30% of female respondents compared to 17% of males). Whereas 41% of male students indicated that family connections were important when finding a job (D2d) (compared to 31% of female students), female students saw which part of Oman a person came from (D2a) as having a greater influence (34% compared to 24%). Nasser and Abouchedid's (2006) findings that female graduates seeking work would be more likely to use informal methods was not borne out in

these findings; the use of personal contacts (C1b) was indicated as a job search approach by 37% of the total number of male respondents compared to 32% of the total number of female respondents and 12% of males indicated that they would use word of mouth (C1k) compared to 8% of females.

#### 4.2.5 Socio-cultural factors

As indicated in section 2.4.5, transitions are mediated by cultural factors (Evans, 2002). These include the family, collective values, religion, social networks and social status. In terms of family influence on their choice of study, less than 10% of the total number of questionnaire respondents had chosen their field of study because of their family or parents, with little difference between genders; 13% of the total number of students studying in a private HEI indicated this compared to just over 5% of SQU students, perhaps because in many of these cases the students' families were funding the studies and therefore had a greater say. According to over a third of respondents, family connections still influenced finding a job, but less than 10% ascribed success in job search to tribal affiliations. Just less than 30% indicated that which part of Oman applicants came from was a factor when it came to finding a job, with 35% of private sector HEIs indicating this compared to 26% of SQU students. As noted above, 34% of female respondents saw this as being an influencing factor compared to 24% of male respondents. The importance of job status has been highlighted as one of the cultural influences on students' preference for seeking government positions (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; Salehi-Isfahani & Dhillon, 2008; Al Lamki, 1998) and was reiterated in one of the focus group discussions:

*Some people...look for more like social positions...they look for government... Now...some people think about those positions...we should never forget the word tribe...tribal based kind of country they do believe in those things (SQU male student)*

As the majority of the participants were planning to seek positions in the private sector, it would seem that status was no longer a key motivator, although this was not explored with the students who indicated they would be searching for employment in the public sector.

### *Wasta*

One of the features of the Arab labour market is the notion of *wasta* or influence (Hutchings and Weir, 2006; Cunningham and Sarayrah, 1994). Although informal job search practices may occur in many societies (Mortimer, 2002), *wasta* is seen as an inevitable feature of collective societies (Hutchings and Weir, 2006). *Wasta* could be considered to be negative social capital; in cases where an individual uses their social networks for personal advancement, it promotes unfairness and resentment. Although *wasta* is seen as having had an impact on the transition context in Oman in the past (Al Balushi, 2008), focus group participants were aware of mechanisms that had been put in place to reduce the influence of *wasta*, such as more open and transparent procedures for applying for government posts and the establishment of Public Authority for Manpower Register established in 2011:

*Nowadays they are forcing people to apply without wasta...before fifteen years there was wasta (College A, female student)*

*The Ministry of Civil Service you will not find any job without going through it you have to sit for a test, and interview then from I think 200 or something you get chance to get a job (College A, male student)*

Wasta was seen to have an impact in all areas of the labour market, private as well as public sector:

*There is more [wasta] in public sector. It still exists (SQU, female student)*

*Wasta still exists...but it is reduced...Even in private sector there is wasta (College A, male student)*

However, a number of students in all four focus groups felt that *wasta* still had a role to play in finding job opportunities, but it was seen as part of the fabric of Omani society and not necessarily from a negative perspective:

*In many ways, they [Omanis] support each other, they recommend each other, they help each other (College A, female student)*



In the questionnaire responses, just over a third of the total number of students planned to find a job through personal contacts; *wasta* was still seen as important with 54% of male and female students indicating that finding a job was dependent upon it. There was a slight difference in the results among those studying in different types of institutions, with 58% of SQU students indicating that *wasta* was important compared to 50% of the total number of students studying at a private HEI. Around 28% of respondents agreed that getting a job depends on who you know, with 39% slightly agreeing. However, over 40% of the total number of students indicated that a fair selection process was important to them when looking for a job with no significant differences between gender or type of institution. This would suggest that for some students, the importance of *wasta* could be waning.

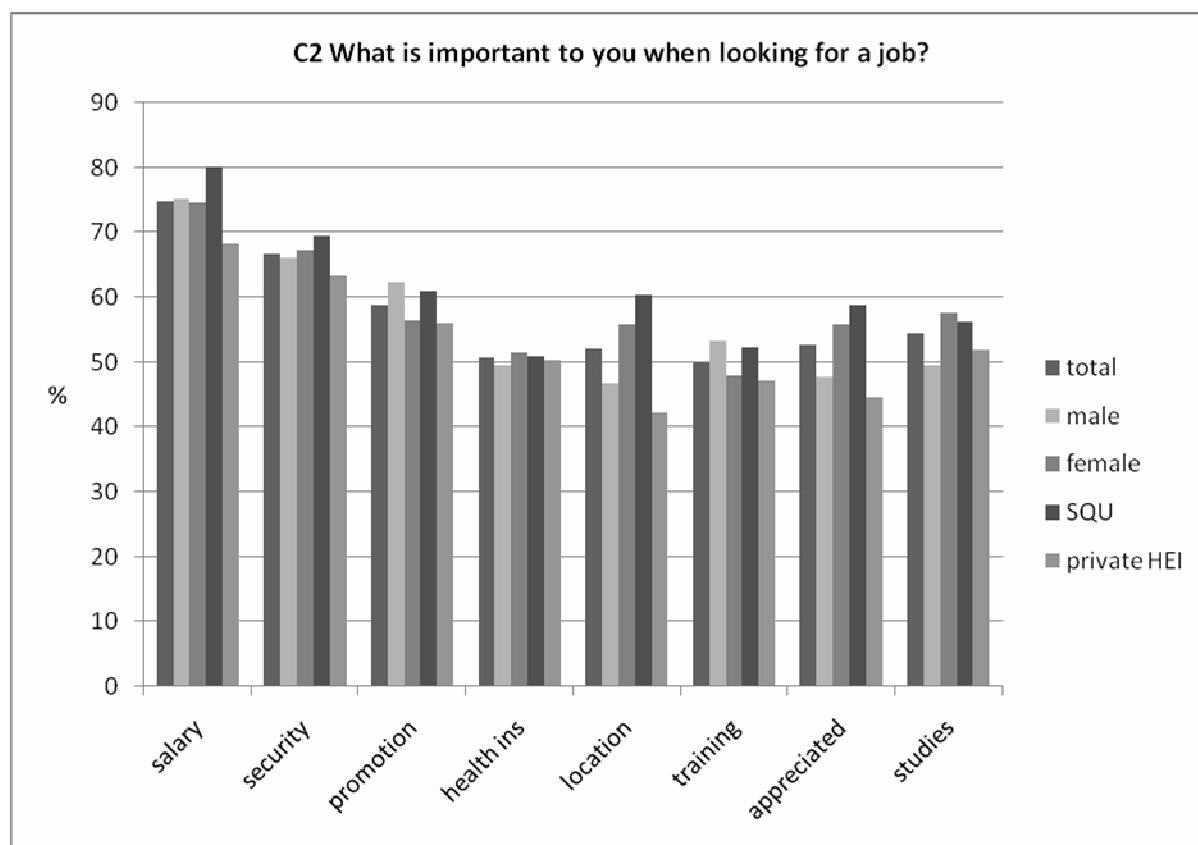
### **4.3 The individual in the transition context**

This research provided the opportunity to explore what factors motivated young people in search of employment. Understanding motivation, associated with the concept of agency (Emirbayer and Misch, 1998), can provide insight into how undergraduate students perceive their transition context. Do jobseekers demonstrate a passive individualisation “*in which the young person is carried along in socially accepted transition patterns, without a sense of ultimate goal or overall direction*” (Evans, 2007:86) or is there a shift towards individuals willing to play an active role and exercise greater agency in their transition context?

#### **4.3.1 Motivating factors**

Section C2 of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate which factors were important to them when looking for a job, which included salary, contractual

conditions, working environment, nature of work, training and whether or not the position was in the government sector (based on factors identified by Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; Nasser and Abouchedid, 2006; and Al Lamki, 1998) (see Table 8).



**Table 8** Questionnaire results for section C2

As found in the 2012 Arab Youth Survey (ASDA'A Burson-Marsteller, 2012) a good salary (C2a) was indicated as being the most important factor for job seekers, with almost 75% of the total number of respondents selecting this option, slightly higher for SQU respondents (80%) with little difference between the number of male and female responses. Job security (C2c) was the second most popular factor but only 12% felt that having a job with little chance of being fired was important. However, less than 10% of the total considered that they

would be in the same job in five years' time (C3d). Regular performance assessment was important to fewer than 30% of the total number of respondents; slightly more than half of the respondents disagreed or slightly disagreed that underperforming employees should be sacked (C2h).

'Opportunities for promotion' (C2d) was the third most selected motivating factor. Promotion was also discussed amongst focus group participants:

*If you are like an employee in the government it's hard to get promoted...in like private yourself if you didn't get promoted after one year or two year you can go out because you deserve to be promoted if you did a good work in the government even if you did your best and it was very perfect you still will not get promoted (College A, male student)*

Nearly 50% of the total number of questionnaire respondents envisaged themselves in management positions in five years' time, with an almost equal percentage of male and female respondents. This may reflect unrealistic expectations, which was raised in one of the focus group meetings:

*Some people do [want to become managers straight away]. They have higher expectations and everything. They should have high expectations but not that much (College A, female student)*

Over 48% of respondents thought that having a friendly place to work was important and over 45% of female respondents and 41% of males wanted to find a job where they would be given responsibility. Location of the place of work (C2f), finding a job with opportunities for training (C2o) and finding a job linked to studies (C2w) were also important to questionnaire respondents. Over 50% of the total number of respondents indicated that being appreciated in the workplace was important (C2u) with a slightly higher percentage of the total number of female students selecting this (55%) compared to male students (48%).

Just over 41% of the total respondents wanted to find a job where they could make a difference (C2t) and just less than 40% were looking for a challenging working environment (C2j). The need to be appreciated was also raised in the focus groups, for example:

*Basically, money is a good reason to motivate me but for me the priority is the place that embraces your ideas you can add something to the company...even when I do something that I am not appreciated it I feel demotivated so for me it's a place where they think I am unique and I can improve the places where I apply (SQU, male student)*

*The advantage of private company is that there is more chance of promotion, you can show creativity and your voice is heard (SQU, female student)*

Having access to private health insurance was an important factor for almost half of the total number of respondents. This is despite free health care being available to all Omanis as the private health care sector, currently burgeoning in Oman, has fewer waiting lists and anecdotally has a better reputation. This was also given as a reason for wanting to work in the private sector by one of the focus group participants. In terms of working conditions, shorter working hours (C2i) were significantly more important for female respondents (30%) than for males (17%), which may be linked to the anticipation of child-raising responsibilities. Overall less than 17% of respondents were interested in finding 'easy work' (C2r), with 20% of females selecting this, compared to 12% of male students. Hardly any students indicated that they had no views and were prepared to take just any job.

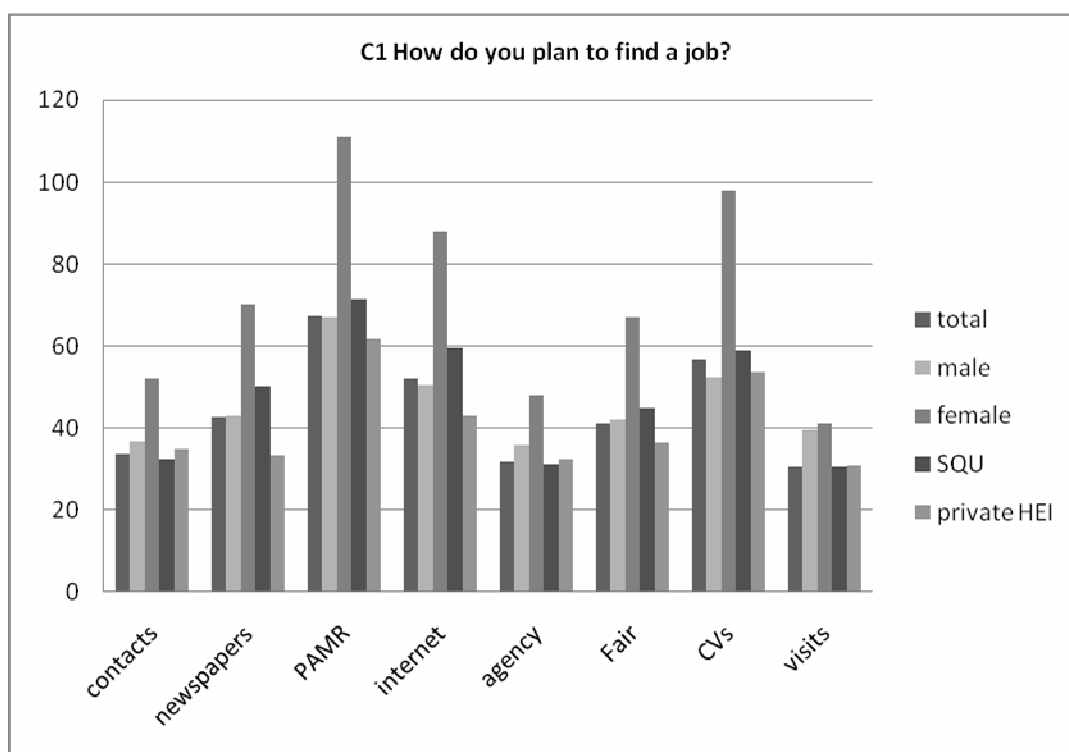
#### 4.3.2 Job search strategies

Job search strategies were included in the focus group interview schedule (appendix B). Planned job search strategies could be seen as indicators of 'active individualisation' (Evans, 2002). Limited research has been carried out in this area as to the effectiveness of the different approaches. Focus group participants had a range of views on this:

*[whose responsibility to find a job] It's no one person, it's your job, it's the government job, the university job as a student there are so many dimensions here (SQU, male student)*

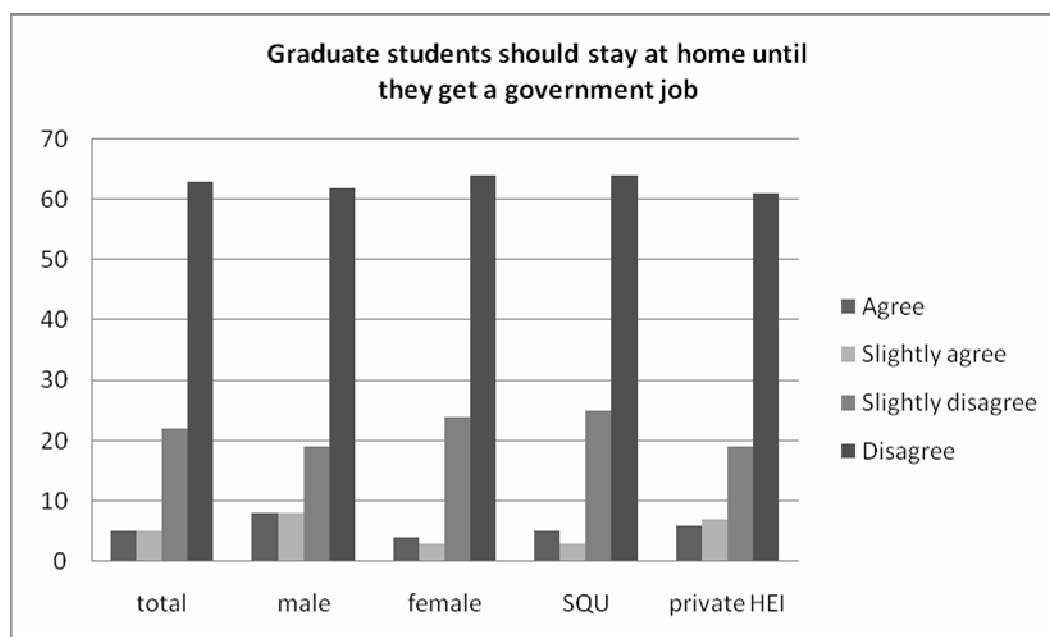
*No matter how hard you work in college or university it's difficult to get jobs (College A, female student)*

Section C1 of the questionnaire asked respondents to indicate how they planned to find a job from the options offered (see **Table 9**). Nearly two thirds of the total number of students planned to register with the Public Authority for Manpower Register (PAMR) in order to find a job. Over 56% planned to send out CVs and 52% planned to use the internet, although currently in Oman most jobs are advertised through newspapers rather than the internet. Over a third of the total number of respondents planned to either use newspapers to find a job, use an employment agency, visit companies or go through personal contacts. As noted in section 4.2.4 above, female students were less likely to visit companies than male students. Less than 10% intended to depend on word of mouth; 4% of male respondents did not know what they planned to do compared to nearly 8% of females. Only one out of the 274 students sampled indicated that they were not interested in finding a job.



**Table 9** Questionnaire results for section C1

It has been indicated in the literature that graduates in the region would rather stay at home and wait for a government job (Mashood, 2009; Valeri, 2009; Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). While this was not explicitly discussed in the focus groups, it was included as a statement in the questionnaire (D1w). As can be seen in **Table 10** findings were fairly consistent across male/female and SQU/private HEI respondents, with 61% of the total number of questionnaire respondents disagreeing and 19% slightly disagreeing with the statement and only 7% slightly agreeing and 6% agreeing. This would suggest that there is little support amongst the students sampled for the notion of a deliberately chosen 'waithood'.



**Table 10** Questionnaire results for statement D1w

#### 4.3.3 Indicators of agency

As noted above, a further consideration of the literature on youth transitions following the analysis of the focus group data prompted the exploration of the concept of agency in the Omani transition context. Potential indicators of agency (see Appendix E) were included in the questionnaire and the focus group transcripts were explored retrospectively for correlation of findings. These indicators were derived from the literature (see section 3.6.1) on the role of agency in youth transitions (Woolley, 2009; Bandura, 2008; Hitlin and Elder, 2007; Walther, 2006).

##### *Self efficacy*

A number of statements broadly relating to self-efficacy were included in Section E of the questionnaire, “How would you describe yourself?” Over 80% of the total number of respondents agreed or slightly agreed that they took their studies seriously (E6a); learnt new things easily (43% of total males agreeing compared



to 35% of total females) (E6c). Fewer students (22% agreeing and 48% slightly agreeing) found it easy to solve problems (E6f) and less than half agreed that they did not find it difficult to finish things on time (E6g). Just over 43% of the total number of respondents agreed and 35% slightly agreed that they knew who to go to if they had a difficulty (E6b). In relation to self-reflexivity, an ability to reflect and learn from experience, over half the total number of respondents agreed that they learnt from their mistakes (E6e), with 30% slightly agreeing; just over 80% agreed or slightly agreed that they did not give up easily (E6l).

### *Facing uncertainty with ease*

Being able to face an uncertain future with ease is seen as another indicator of agency (Evans, 2007; Woolley, 2005). Questionnaire respondents were asked about whether finding a job with a long term contract was important (C2b) which only 20% of the total number of respondents thought to be important. In contrast, nearly 67% of the total number of respondents indicated that job security was important to them (C2c), with similar results for male and female students.

### *Ability to recognise strengths and weaknesses*

Just under half, 45%, of the total number of respondents agreed that getting a job depended on their abilities (D1e), with 38% slightly agreeing. Only 9% slightly disagreed and less than 4% disagreed. However, over half of the total number of female students agreed (51%) (despite the government's role being more important according to female respondents) compared to just over a third (36%) of male students while the responses for SQU and private HEI students were similar. In response to statement D1j, "being successful depends on other

people”, 53% of the total number of respondents disagreed (46% of SQU students compared to 60% of private HEI students) and 25% slightly disagreed. Nearly 12% slightly agreed and 6% agreed. These findings would suggest that the majority of these respondents recognised the importance of their own efforts in finding a job to some degree, an indicator of personal agency in their transition behaviour. Over 80% of respondents agreed or slightly agreed that they learnt from mistakes (E6e) and learnt new things easily (E6c); slightly fewer (22% agreeing and 48% slightly agreeing) that they found it easy to solve problems (E6f). Just over 59% of respondents agreed that people who are successful in life usually deserve it (D1r), with 27% slightly agreeing; however, 54% of male respondents agreed compared to 62% of female respondents. Around half the total number of respondents agreed they were confident in social situations (E6n) and 34% slightly agreed.

The importance of structural factors was potentially indicated in the results that showed 58% of male students disagreed (26% disagreeing and 32% slightly disagreeing) that it was their own fault if they did not find a job (D1z) compared to 75% of the total number of female respondents (49% disagreeing and 26% slightly disagreeing). Over 60% of total respondents agreed or slightly agreed with the statement that they felt confident that they would find a job quickly (D1c), with 27% of males agreeing compared to 20% of females. While it would seem that female students were less confident, more females (43%) than males (31%) slightly agreed with this statement. In the views of the respondents, luck plays a much smaller role (31%) in job hunting than their own efforts (70% overall) and personality (66% overall).

*Forethought and planning*

Forethought is considered to be an indicator of agency (Bandura, 2008; Hitlin and Elder, 2007). Evidence of planning and forethought can be found in contributions from the focus group participants. One female student gave her rationale for specialising in English:

*...in private companies and private sectors there are people who knows both English and Arabic so it's not a problem they don't...they won't...they didn't need translators or anything but in government sectors they do need them (College A, female student)*

There was also evidence of students making deliberate decisions on what areas to study with future prospects in mind:

*It was my decision...I used to study engineering then I changed my major to business which is completely different...but I found myself in business, I can do this. I chose HR...any company in the whole world from the lollipop company till oil company there is a HR department so more job opportunities and in this department the biggest number of employees are there...so that's why. (College A, male student)*

*For me I choose information systems because information systems is an emerging system in the market maybe we have started in*

*2002 to jump in this sector and it is an emerging sector so there is many jobs in this sector and I can improve my skills and cooperate and do something (SQU male student)*

In the questionnaire findings, over 60% of total respondents slightly disagreed or disagreed with the “wait and see” option with regard to planning for the future (D1g), with slightly more males than females agreeing with this statement. A similar number of respondents overall (67%) slightly disagreed or disagreed with the idea that they decided to study in the absence of other option (D1q), with less than 15% of total respondents indicating that chose their course of study as they had no other choice (B1i) and less than 8% choosing their area of study for no particular reason (B1j). In the statement related to planning (D1m), 67% of the total respondents either agreed (30%) or slightly agreed (37%) that they had a clear plan for what they were going to do after their studies. Just over 25% of male and female respondents thought that finding a job was dependent on planning ahead (D2n). Over 54% of the total number of respondents agreed and 31% slightly agreed that they liked to plan ahead (E6d). However, over 70% of the total sample agreed or slightly agreed that they “take each day as it comes” (E6h). As this seemed to contradict the positive attitude towards planning, the Arabic translation was clarified with a bilingual speaker and confirmed that the statement could be interpreted as people able to cope with things as they arose rather than a lack of planning.

It is interesting to note that section E ‘How would you describe yourself’ had the majority of unanswered statements (representing neither agree nor disagree)

with nine out of the fifteen statements having at least 10% non response. This may be due to lack of self-awareness in these areas.

### *Optimism*

The statement “I am optimistic about my future” (E6o) was added after the pilot study following the release of the 2012 Arab Youth Survey (ASDA/A Burson-Marsteller, 2012). In the Arab Youth Survey, nearly three quarters of the Omani respondents believed that their best days lay ahead of them with 61% indicating that they had more opportunities now than a year ago. The findings of this research’s questionnaire indicated that 61% of the total number of respondents agreed with the statement that they were optimistic about their future and 23% slightly agreed, providing some correlation with the 2012 survey. A sense of optimism would suggest that the graduates who agreed with this statement do not have a sense of risk or uncertainty about their future (in contrast to the hypothesis of the individualisation thesis (Beck, 1992)) and feel confident about their prospects. It would be interesting to measure the sense of optimism once these respondents have graduated and started searching for a job.

## **CHAPTER 5 CONCLUSIONS**

### **5.1 Introduction**

This chapter summarises the key findings of this research in light of the aims and objectives. There is also a consideration of its limitations, suggestions for future studies and a final conclusion, identifying the contribution to an understanding of youth transitions in Oman this research has made.

### **5.2 Aims and Objectives of this Research**

As indicated in chapter one, Oman is a country in transition and its changing landscape presents many opportunities as well as challenges for its growing youth population. Young people are being encouraged to exercise agency in their job search activities while “deterministic social structures” (Evans and Rudd, 1998:60) have a key role to play in the education to work transition context. This research aimed to explore:

- How graduating students see structural factors (government policies, education, labour market, socio-cultural factors) influencing their education to work transition context? To what extent do students perceive these to be opportunities and/or constraints
- The key motivating factors in seeking employment
- Any indication of personal agency in the transition behaviour of these students

This research also aimed to consider whether there was a notable difference in the perceptions of students in terms of gender or whether they were studying a

publicly-funded institution or not; and whether there had been a change in the perceptions of graduates since Al Lamki's 1998 research.

### **5.3 Key findings from this research**

How graduate students perceived the influence of structural factors, such as the government and its policy of Omanisation, the labour market, the education system, gender and socio-cultural factors was explored in the focus groups and the self-completion questionnaire. One of the key considerations of this context was the fact that while the students participating in this study were the first generation in Oman to have access to extensive post secondary opportunities, they are also amongst the first group of student cohorts for whom public sector employment is no longer guaranteed.

#### *The role of the government*

The proposition that government is perceived as having a key role to play in the education to work transition environment (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; Yousef, 2004) is borne out by these results. As the findings have shown, the government is seen as responsible for providing jobs for graduates, and not just in the public sector. However, the majority of the questionnaire respondents agreed to some extent that finding a job was dependent on their abilities. This would suggest that young people acknowledge they have a contribution to make in finding a job rather than feeling 'entitled' (Forstenlechner and Rutledge, 2010; World Bank, 2004), i.e. being given for job without the involvement of personal effort or just expecting that the government will provide (Pollock, 2008). However, for some focus group participants, skills development of the workforce was the government's responsibility. While

Omanisation was seen as being a key driver in the supply of employment opportunities in the private sector, the government is responsible for ensuring its success. There was no clear consensus that being Omani gave jobseekers a competitive advantage in the labour market; respondents recognised, however, that it was not in the employers' interests to replace all expatriate employees.

### *The labour market*

One of the key areas of debate regarding the labour market in the region is the willingness of young people to accept work in the private sector (Valeri, 2009; Salehi- Isfahani and Dhillon, 2008). While findings of earlier research (Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner, 2012; Al Lamki, 1998) indicate that graduates in the Gulf would rather accept a job in the public sector, this view was not supported by these research findings. The majority of focus group participants intended, in the first instance, to look for employment in the private sector attracted by more interesting work, career opportunities and better pay and conditions. It is acknowledged that the focus groups represent only a small sample of graduating students; however, the questionnaire findings showed that more students chose their field of study because of prospects in the private sector than in the public sector. There were no clear indications that the public sector drove young people's job search strategies. In terms of future plans, less than a quarter of the respondents saw themselves working in the government sector in five years' time, although the findings showed that where there was an interest in finding employment in the public sector, this was higher amongst female respondents than males. The findings of this research would infer that there has been a change in graduate perceptions since Al Lamki's research was carried out. One



reason for this could be that Al Lamki's research was carried out in Oman more than fifteen years ago and in the intervening period there has been greater competition amongst graduates for public sector positions. Private sector employers have also improved in terms of pay and conditions and in the number of opportunities available for graduates. Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner's 2012 research was carried out in the UAE which has a much smaller population of Emiratis and a less well established localisation programme than in Oman. Although there was some evidence of a culture of negative stereotypes of nationals in the workplace based on the experience of some of the focus group participants in line with Al Waqfi and Forstenlechner's (2010) UAE-based research, this view was not fully supported by the questionnaire findings.

### *Education*

As the extracts from the focus group discussions show, some students had strong views about the inadequacies of the education system in Oman based on their own direct experience. Pursuing higher studies and having qualifications were seen as prerequisites for success in finding employment. However, while the limitation in the choice of programmes available was acknowledged, the majority of questionnaire respondents had chosen their major in order to find a job in the future. Overall, there was a sense from students that institutions could be doing more to prepare them for their future and in helping them to find work. One of the sub-aims of this research was to consider whether studying at Sultan Qaboos University or a private funded institution had an impact on the findings. There was some variation in findings, such as SQU students indicating that they had a better career service and were more likely to be motivated by higher

salaries but there were no notable trends. This would imply that perceptions of structural factors influencing the transition context and indicators of agency were not particularly affected by the type of institution an individual attended.

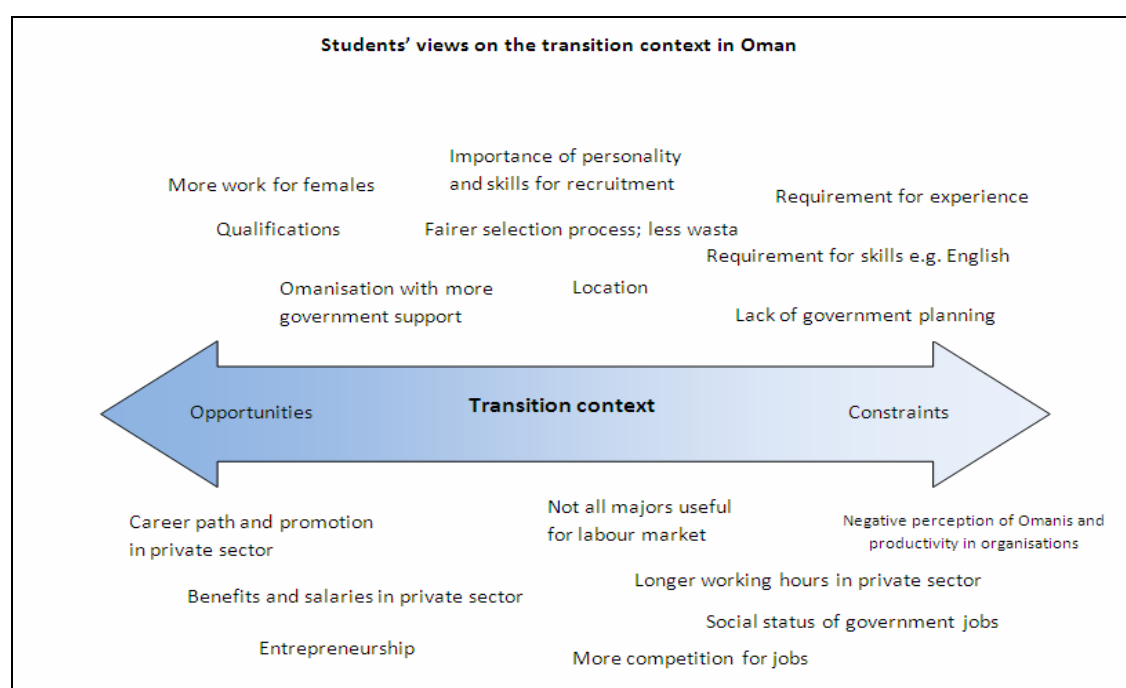
### *Gender and sociocultural factors*

One of the most interesting findings in terms of gender was the fact that the vast majority of female participants and respondents were intending to play an active role in the workplace, with half of the questionnaire respondents envisaging themselves in management positions in five year's time. The reputation that female students have in the region for being study-orientated was supported in these findings. However, cultural features, such as females being less likely to visit companies or work away from their families could be seen as having a potentially negative impact on their success in finding employment. One of the most notable differences between the responses between male and female questionnaire respondents was the extent to which they disagreed that it was their fault if they did not find a job, with three quarters of the female respondents disagreeing to some degree. This may be down to the fact that most female students are more engaged with their studies than male students, and therefore feel that they have done everything within their control in order to become qualified to find a job. Alternatively, they may be less willing to accept responsibility when they are not successful.

Whether or not *wasta* has a diminishing role to play in the transition context was unclear. Focus group participants suggested that its impact was less important than before although acknowledged that it still existed. The questionnaire

findings revealed that over half the respondents believed that finding a job was dependent on it. *Wasta* is so woven into the cultural fabric of Omani society that it is difficult to see how its role will ever be completely eradicated. In terms of structural factors, the findings of this research would appear to correlate Côté and Bynner's observation that "structural factors, as mediated by the family and local opportunity structures, continue to have a commanding place in the shaping of youth transitions" (2008:255).

### 5.3.1 Opportunities and constraints



**Figure 4** Opportunities and constraints in the transition context in Oman

Overall views on the opportunities and constraints of the transition context are represented on a cline in **Figure 4**. The private sector was perceived as providing more opportunities for advancement with improved salary and benefits, key motivating factors. Focus group participants in particular recognised that there were increased opportunities for females in the private as well as the public

sector. Omanisation was also seen as driver of change but it was felt that it needed government support to ensure that it was implemented in the private sector. While qualifications were seen as facilitating opportunities, there was perceived to be a lack of alignment with the programmes on offer and the needs of employers and the labour market. There was an indication from the questionnaire results that young people are interested in entrepreneurship. Location was seen as a potential constraint, particularly for female questionnaire respondents. Barriers to successful employment were seen by focus group participants to be the need for experience; increased competition for jobs; English language skills in the private sector; and the negative perceptions of Omanis in the workplace, although the latter issue was not corroborated in the questionnaire findings.

### 5.3.2 Indicators of personal agency in transition behaviour

Evans and Heinz (1993) devised a typology of education to work transition behaviour, which included *strategic*; *step by step*; *taking chances*; and *wait and see*. Salehi-Isfahani and Dhillon (2008) posit that *waithood* is a significant feature of graduate youth transitions in the Middle East region, in part as a result of young people's dependence on public sector employment and lack of agency. There was evidence from the focus group and questionnaire findings that the majority of students had made conscious decisions to choose a particular route of study with future prospects in mind rather than because they had no other choice, potentially demonstrating 'strategic' transition behaviour. Over 60% of the questionnaire respondents disagreed to some degree that they would adopt a "wait and see" option with regard to their future plans, although only a quarter would plan their job search strategies. Over 80% of respondents disagreed to

some extent that graduates should wait at home to get a government job. This would reflect a view amongst these students that young people should play a proactive role in the youth transition context, as opposed to 'passive individualisation' seen as moving along "socially accepted career patterns, without a sense of ultimate goal or overall direction" (Evans, 2007:86). The sense of optimism that the majority of these respondents showed, with over 80% agreeing to some extent that they were positive about their future, would suggest that the questionnaire respondents did not necessarily share the grievances that motivated the protestors in 2011.

These findings suggest that any analysis of students' perceptions of the influence of structural factors on their transition context is complex; neither a case of finding individuals merely at the whim of the vagaries of government policies, bouncing between the flotsam and jetsam of opportunities nor individuals freely in the process of creating their choice biographies. There is a clear ambiguity in the fact that while the majority of participants and respondents expected the government to provide employment for all graduates, they recognised the importance of their own abilities in finding a job and did not advocate a self-imposed *waithood*. The individual cannot be separated from the wider social processes and this juxtaposition of structural factors and personal agency points to Evans' concept of "bounded agency":

*...actors as having a past and imagined future possibilities, which guide and shape actions in the present, together with subjective perceptions of the structures they have to negotiate, the social*

*landscapes that affect how they act. Bounded agency is socially situated agency, influenced but not determined by environments and emphasizing internalized frames of reference as well as external actions (2007:92).*

## **5.4 Limitations**

There are a number of limitations in the overall scope of this research. Firstly, a certain amount of caution needs to be exercised on selecting topics that can be discussed with students in Oman, either in focus groups or in questionnaires. Oman is a country in which there are no political parties (Valeri, 2009) and meetings in which political discussion can take place are strongly discouraged. In light of recent events, there is a certain amount of sensitivity in discussing the role of the Omani government in controlling demonstrators and its response to the unrest. The national media has recognised that there is a need for a more open, democratic approach to government and decision-making; however, Oman is an autocracy in the early stages of a potential transition.

Another issue which has been highlighted in international reports (World Bank, 2004) is the lack of reliable statistical data. For example the 2010 census figures (issued May 2011) stated that the expatriate population is 816,143 (General Census of Population, Housing and Establishments (2010). However Ministry of Manpower figures published stated that 1,165,598 work visas were issued for expatriates (Oman Observer, April 2011), showing a discrepancy of 349,455 in the number of expatriates in Oman. For the purposes of this research, data published by the Ministry of National Economy (which is the formal body for providing data to ILO, UNESCO and World Bank) was used.

Specific limitations related to the research approach are discussed in section 0. However, it is worth noting here that while the focus groups and questionnaires generated a useful amount of data, the use of software to analyse the qualitative data and SPSS to analyse the quantitative data may have provided more insight into the validity and range of these findings. The findings focus primarily on the variables of gender and type of institution the participants and respondents studied in. However, there were a number of other possible variables that were included in the questionnaire that were not explored, such as size of family and parents' occupation which would be interesting to consider in any future analysis of the data. It would have been useful to have focus groups after the questionnaire findings had been analysed to explore some of the ambiguities and clarify viewpoints.

## **5.5 Future research**

This research has provided the initial opportunity to explore graduating students' perceptions of structural factors in Oman. Future research could also include a more explicit exploration of how young people viewed the role of agency and the extent to which structure and agency are interdependent elements (Tomlinson, 2007). It would also be of interest to explore the perceptions of students who were based outside Muscat and also to survey students enrolled on non-business programmes. Expectations of students could be matched against their graduate destinations, following cohorts through the transition experience. Exploration of employers' perceptions of recruiting Omanis would offer another perspective.

On a broader scale, it would be worthwhile looking at concepts in the transition context, such as metaphors and concepts application to different contexts. This research has not explored structure and agency in terms of “a mutually interacting duality” (Tomlinson, 2007) or looked at structuration theory (Giddens, 1984) but the shifting sands of the Omani transition context may be an interesting environment to explore the relevance of such concepts.

## 5.6 Concluding thoughts

Developing an understanding of the employment expectations of graduating students in Oman has implications for the promotion of localisation policies and provides an indication to employers and career advisors of graduate expectations. This research has attempted to explore the perceived influence of structural factors and indicators of agency developed within the education to work transition context in Oman using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research instruments. The findings would suggest that the use of concepts and models developed in industrialised countries can offer a means to investigate the transition landscape in other less familiar contexts. As Oman develops its social, employment and educational policies within its cultural framework and young people become more active participants in their transition to work, it is worth heeding Evans’ warning:

*Societies need to ensure that the greatest demands to ‘take control of their lives’ do not fall on those who are the least powerfully placed in the “social landscape” they inhabit (2007:93).*



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## APPENDIX A INTRODUCTORY LETTER

16 April 2011

Dear Student

I am presenting conducting research for my Doctorate in Social Sciences (with University of Leicester, UK) to find out what **Omanisation** means to graduating Omani students studying in public and private sector institutions. For the purposes of this study, I am holding meetings with small groups of students (focus groups) in the College of Commerce and Economics (CCE), SQU to find out what you think about Omanisation and your future career path. These meetings will be recorded. Your views will help me develop a questionnaire which will be given to final year students from a number of different institutions in Oman later on.

Please note that your views expressed in these meetings will be treated in strict confidence and used solely for the purposes of this study. Your name and identity will not be used and the information and recordings from these meetings will be stored on my personal computer until end of 2012 when I plan to submit my thesis. If you agree to take part, we will be discussing the following areas:

*Why did you choose the subject you are studying?*

*What are your plans for future employment? Where will you apply? Do you plan to work in the private or public sector?*

*What does Omanisation mean to you?*

*How could the government encourage more Omanis to work in the private sector?*

*What are your views on finding a job and your career path?*

I will be accompanied by Rasha Al Raisi who will be available to help with translation should you wish to express your views in Arabic. If you agree to take part, you can change your mind at any time without need for an explanation. If you would like more information, you can email me at the address below or contact Dr Fahim Al Marhubi, Dean of CCE, SQU.

I look forward to having the opportunity to talk with you. Many thanks for your support.

Tess Goodliffe

[tess\\_goodliffe@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:tess_goodliffe@yahoo.co.uk)

## APPENDIX B FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Theme	Example guiding questions
Purpose of study	<p><i>Why did you choose the subject you are studying?</i></p> <p><i>Why did you decide to do a degree? You or your parents?</i></p>
Future plans	<p><i>What are your plans for future employment? Where will you apply? Do you plan to work in the private or public sector?</i></p> <p><i>What are your views on finding a job and your career path?</i></p> <p><i>What type of job are you looking for?</i></p> <p><i>First choice? Private or public sector? Why?</i></p> <p><i>What will you do to find a job?</i></p>
Opportunities; e.g. Omanisation	<p><i>What does Omanisation mean to you?</i></p> <p><i>How could the government encourage more Omanis to work in the private sector?</i></p> <p><i>Do you think Omanisation is working?</i></p> <p><i>Ask them about Al Lamki's research – what do they think and is there a difference now? Why is there a difference now? What has happened in last 15 years?</i></p> <p><i>What do you think of the government's response to the protests/the 50,000 jobs?</i></p> <p><i>Is it a generation thing? Is life different to your parents?</i></p>
Potential constraints	<p><i>How will you get work experience? What can be done about filling the experience gap (after this came up in first group)</i></p> <p><i>Do you think it's true that young people want to be managers?</i></p> <p><i>Does wasta still exist?</i></p>



## APPENDIX C FOCUS GROUP PROFILES

Include information sheet etc [maybe include copy of a transcript?]

Group A Female students from College A  $N=11$

<b>N</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Area of Study</b>	<b>Sponsored or private</b>
1	19	Muscat	Business Administration	private
2	19	Muscat	BA (Hons)	private
3	21	Muscat	HR	private
4	18	Muscat	HR	private
5	20	Al Dahara	HR	private
6	20	A'Seeb	HR	sponsored
7	23	Muscat	IT	private
8	20	Muscat	IT	private
9	18	Hajer Muscat	Business with English	sponsored
10	20	Muscat	Business with English	private
11	20	Muscat	IT	private

Group B Male students from College A (University College)  $N=13$

<b>N</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Area of Study</b>	<b>Sponsored or private</b>
1	25	Muscat	HR	private
2	22	Muscat	Accounting	private
3	18	Muscat	General business	private
4	18	Muscat	HR	private
5	23	Muscat	General business	private
6	23	Muscat	E-business	private
7	21	Muscat	HR	private
8	24	Muscat	Finance	private
9	26	Ibra	Finance	sponsored
10	21	Muscat	IT networking	private
11	24	Muscat	IT networking	private
12	25	Muscat	IT networking	sponsored
13	22	Muscat	General Business	private

Group C Female students from Sultan Qaboos University  $N=4$

<b>N</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Area of Study</b>	<b>Sponsored or private</b>
1	22	Muscat/Quriyat	Management	sponsored
2	21	Muscat	Information Systems	sponsored
3	21	Muscat	Finance	sponsored
4	21	Muscat	Marketing	sponsored

Group D Male students from Sultan Qaboos University  $N=9$

<b>N</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Area of Study</b>	<b>Sponsored or private</b>
<b>1</b>	23	Muscat	Management	sponsored
<b>2</b>	23	Sumail	Operations management	sponsored
<b>3</b>	22	Al Mudhibi	Finance	sponsored
<b>4</b>	24	Salalah	Economics	sponsored
<b>5</b>	23	Alawabi	Economics	sponsored
<b>6</b>	23	Sur	Operations management	sponsored
<b>7</b>	23	Musanna	Information systems	sponsored
<b>8</b>	24	Rustaq	Economics	sponsored
<b>9</b>	21	Muscat	Accounting	sponsored

## APPENDIX D EXTRACT FROM FOCUS GROUP TRANSCRIPT

### Interview with Group A (College A)

*Female students n = 11, all full-time undergraduate students in business-related areas*

S10:	At our house it was a condition like study whatever you want but in Muscat only	Theme: influence of socio cultural factors
TG:	So as long as...so the place was important to your parents where you came to study (SS: Yes).  You came to College A, OK. And...you've got a bit of time, some of you, maybe a year or two before you go into the job market but what are your plans for when you graduate, what sort of job, if it were possible, would you like to get?	
S6:	We need training...first to get trained and have experience because nowadays they don't want fresh graduates that much...they need experience.	Theme: expectations of the labour market
TG:	Who are they?	
S6:	In the business world (TG: Aha). The companies and organisations in both private and public sector...they need experienced people.	Theme: expectations of the labour market
S2:	And what skills you need	Theme: expectations of the labour market
S6:	Especially for me as a HR student, I've heard and I've read and I know the minimum they need is two years of experience for HR.	Theme: expectations of the labour market
TG:	Where are you going to get two years' of experience from?	
S10:	Maybe we can have a get training from studying at the same time...that's what I'm doing for myself actually.	Theme: potential indicator of agency – taking initiative to train
TG:	Oh, OK, which you've done yourself.	
S10:	Yes	Theme: potential indicator of agency – taking initiative to train
S2:	Also in summer you can take training	Theme: potential indicator of agency – taking initiative to train
S6:	Summer training in Bank Muscat	Theme: potential indicator of agency – taking initiative to train
TG:	OK	
S1:	Excuse me ma'am, but from what I knew I took training in the last semester when I have a holiday they said when I was like...training...they said that training they don't mean it as experience	Theme: expectations of the labour market

TG:	Who's they?	
S1:	The organisation that I took part in it they said that there are not taking it as experience.	Theme: expectations of the labour market

## APPENDIX E THEMES EXPLORED IN FOCUS GROUPS AND QUESTIONNAIRE

	Focus group theme?	Questionnaire
<b>Structural factors</b>		
Role of government (e.g. Omanisation)	✓	<b>D1b</b> The government should provide jobs for all graduates <b>D1d</b> Easier to find a job in the government sector <b>D1n</b> it's easier to find a job if you're Omani <b>D1u</b> government should be helping young people to set up their own business <b>D1y</b> private companies in Oman should replace expats
Education	✓	<b>A1</b> what type of school did you go to? <b>D1a</b> my studies have prepared me for the workplace <b>D1k</b> colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work <b>D2j</b> the subject you studied <b>D2m</b> having the right qualification <b>D1x</b> I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for my future <b>D2c</b> finding a job depends on which institution you studied in
Labour market (i.e. expectations of workplace)	✓	<b>C2h</b> regular performance assessment <b>C2s</b> little chance of being fired <b>D1o</b> employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic <b>D2i</b> finding a job is dependent on having work experience <b>D2h</b> finding a job is dependent on having good grades <b>D2k</b> finding a job is dependent on your workplace skills
Gender	✓	<b>D1f</b> easier for females to find work in the private sector <b>D2f</b> finding a job depends on gender
Socio-cultural factors	✓	<b>D1p</b> getting a job depends on who you know <b>D2e</b> finding a job depends on which tribe you belong to <b>D2b</b> finding a job depends on wasta <b>D2d</b> finding a job depends on family connections <b>E3</b> father's occupation <b>E4</b> mother's occupation <b>E5</b> size of family
<b>Individual factors</b>		
Motivating factors	✓ (in part)	<b>B1b</b> Good job prospects in the private sector <b>B1c</b> Good job prospects in the government <b>C2a</b> Good salary <b>C2d</b> Opportunities for promotion <b>C2e</b> Health insurance <b>C2g</b> Longer public holidays <b>C2i</b> Shorter working hours <b>C2r</b> Easy work <b>C2l</b> Friendly place to work <b>C2m</b> Good retirement benefits <b>C2n</b> Being given responsibility <b>C2p</b> International working environment <b>C2v</b> It's in the government sector <b>D1h</b> underperforming employees should be sacked <b>D1i</b> Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA <b>D1l</b> new graduates should be able to get a job without experience <b>C2k</b> Fair selection process <b>D1e</b> getting a job depends on my abilities <b>D1s</b> more interesting jobs in the private sector <b>D2l</b> finding a job is dependent on your personality

		<b>D2p</b>	finding a job is dependent on good interview skills
Planned job search strategies	✓	<b>C1b</b> Through personal contacts <b>C1c</b> Newspapers <b>C1d</b> Register with manpower authority <b>C1e</b> Internet <b>C1f</b> Employment agency <b>C1g</b> Look for work outside Oman <b>C1h</b> Career's fair <b>C1i</b> Sending out CVs <b>C1j</b> Visiting companies <b>C1k</b> Word of mouth <b>C1l</b> I don't know <b>C1m</b> I'm not interested in finding a job <b>D2g</b> finding a job depends on your own efforts <b>D2q</b> I have no idea what finding a job is dependent upon	
<b>Indicators of agency</b>			
Self-efficacy/Self-reflexivity		<b>E6 e</b> I learn from my mistakes <b>E6 b</b> I know who to go to if I have a difficulty <b>E6 d</b> I like to plan ahead <b>E6 g</b> I find it difficult to finish things on time <b>E6 h</b> I take each day as it comes <b>E6 i</b> I don't like taking risks <b>E6 k</b> I know what I want for my future <b>E6 m</b> People often come to me if they have a difficulty <b>E6 o</b> I am optimistic about my future	
Facing uncertainty with ease		<b>C2b</b> Long term contract (risk avoidance?) <b>C2c</b> Job security (risk avoidance?) <b>D1w</b> graduates should stay at home until they get a government job	
Ability to recognise strengths and weaknesses/confidence		<b>D1c</b> confident that will find a job quickly <b>D1e</b> getting a job depends on my abilities <b>D1j</b> being successful depends on other people <b>D2o</b> finding a job is dependent on having good interview skills <b>E6c</b> I learn new things easily <b>E6e</b> I learn from my mistakes <b>E6f</b> I find it easy to solve problems <b>D1r</b> successful people deserve it	
Planning/thinking ahead	✓	<b>B1d</b> It will help me to open my own business <b>B1e</b> Oman needs people in this field <b>B1g</b> It was my parents'/family choice (not) <b>B1h</b> I wanted to study in this institution <b>B1i</b> I had no other choice (not) <b>B1j</b> No particular reason [choice of study] <b>C2x</b> I have no particular views, I just want any job <b>C2w</b> It's linked to my studies <b>C3a</b> Raising children at home <b>C3b</b> Taking further studies <b>C3c</b> In a management position <b>C3d</b> In the same job as when I started work <b>C3e</b> Unemployed [or structural factor] <b>C3f</b> I'll have worked for more than one company <b>C3g</b> Working for myself <b>C3h</b> Working for the government <b>C3i</b> Working in the private sector <b>C3j</b> Working for my family business <b>C3k</b> Living outside Oman <b>C3l</b> No idea <b>D1g</b> I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; just wait	

		<p>and see</p> <p><b>D1m</b> I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies</p> <p><b>D1q</b> studied here because didn't know what else to do</p> <p><b>D1t</b> studying this major to get a good job</p> <p><b>D1v</b> don't mind – just want a job</p> <p><b>D1z</b> if I don't find a job in the future it's my fault</p> <p><b>D2n</b> finding a job is dependent on planning ahead</p> <p><b>E6j</b> I set myself goals and targets</p>
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## APPENDIX F COPY OF QUESTIONNAIRE

<p><b>Questionnaire: Undergraduate students and transitional behaviour in Oman</b></p> <p>I am working towards a Doctorate in Social Sciences with the University of Leicester, UK. This questionnaire is being carried out as part of my research into employment expectations and transition context of Omani students studying at various HEIs in Muscat.</p> <p>This questionnaire will be given out to groups of higher education undergraduates studying at public and private HEIs in Oman.</p> <p>Please try to answer all the questions and give your own views. Your answers will be treated in the strictest confidence.</p> <p>This questionnaire should take not more than 30 minutes to complete. Please feel free to answer in English or Arabic.</p> <p>Your support and time is much appreciated.</p> <p>Thank you.</p> <p>Tess Goodliffe</p> <p><a href="mailto:tessgoodliffe@gmail.com">tessgoodliffe@gmail.com</a></p>	<p><b>استبيان: السلوك الانتقالي لطلبة التعليم العالي في سلطنة عمان</b></p> <p>أعمل على نيل شهادة الدكتوراه في العلوم الاجتماعية من جامعة ليستر بالمملكة المتحدة. إن هذا الاستبيان هو جزء من دراسة تسعى لمعرفة ما يتوقعه الطلبة العمانيين الملتحقين بمؤسسات التعليم العالي في محافظة مسقط من سوق العمل و سلوكهم الانتقالي.</p> <p>سيتم توزيع هذا الاستبيان على مجموعات من الطلبة في مؤسسات التعليم العالي الحكومية و الخاصة في سلطنة عمان.</p> <p>أرجو أن تجيبوا عن جميع الأسئلة و أن تعبروا من خلالها عن آرائكم بكل شفافية، علماً بأن إجاباتكم سيتم التعامل معها بسرية تامة.</p> <p>إن الوقت المتوقع للإجابة عن الاستبيان لن يتعدى ثلاثون دقيقة و يمكنكم الإجابة إما باللغة العربية أو الانجليزية.</p> <p>أقدر لكم مساعدتكم و تخصيص جزء من وقتكم لهذا الاستبيان.</p> <p>شكراً لكم تس جودلف</p> <p><a href="mailto:tessgoodliffe@gmail.com">tessgoodliffe@gmail.com</a></p>
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بيانات عامة	
<b>A You as a student</b>	
1 What type of school did you go to? (please tick ✓ one)	ما نوع المدرسة التي درست بها؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ إجابة واحدة)
a) Government <input type="checkbox"/>	حكومية <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Private <input type="checkbox"/>	خاصة <input type="checkbox"/>
c) Both <input type="checkbox"/>	كلاهما <input type="checkbox"/>
2 Where in Oman are you from? (please write)	من أية ولاية من السلطنة أنت؟ (يرجى كتابة الإجابة أدناه)
3 Where do you live at the moment? (please tick ✓ one)	أين تسكن حالياً؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ إجابة واحدة)
a) Hostel <input type="checkbox"/>	سكن للطلبة <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Rented place <input type="checkbox"/>	سكن بالإيجار <input type="checkbox"/>
c) With family <input type="checkbox"/>	مع أسرتي <input type="checkbox"/>
d) With friends <input type="checkbox"/>	مع أصدقائي <input type="checkbox"/>
e) Other <input type="checkbox"/>	أخرى <input type="checkbox"/>
4 Have you ever worked/are you in employment now? (please tick ✓ one)	هل سبق لك العمل / أو تعمل حالياً؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ إجابة واحدة)
a) Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	نعم <input type="checkbox"/>
b) No <input type="checkbox"/>	لا <input type="checkbox"/>
5 Who pays for your studies here? (please tick ✓ one)	من يتكفل بدفع الرسوم الدراسية؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ إجابة واحدة)
a) Your family <input type="checkbox"/>	أسرتك <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Government <input type="checkbox"/>	الحكومة <input type="checkbox"/>
c) You <input type="checkbox"/>	أنت <input type="checkbox"/>
d) Other <input type="checkbox"/>	أخرى <input type="checkbox"/>

وضعك الحالي	
<b>B Your present situation</b>	
1 Why did you choose to study in this field? (please tick ✓ ALL that apply)	لماذا اخترت دراسة المجال الذي التحقت به؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ جميع الإجابات المناسبة)
a) Easy to pass <input type="checkbox"/>	لسهولة النجاح <input type="checkbox"/>
b) Good job prospects in the private sector <input type="checkbox"/>	لتوافر فرص العمل بالقطاع الخاص <input type="checkbox"/>
c) Good job prospects in the government <input type="checkbox"/>	لتوافر فرص العمل بالقطاع الحكومي <input type="checkbox"/>
d) It will help me to open my own business <input type="checkbox"/>	هذا المجال سيساعدني في تنفيذ مشروع تجاري خاص <input type="checkbox"/>
e) Oman needs people in this field <input type="checkbox"/>	لحاجة السلطنة إلى هذا التخصص <input type="checkbox"/>
f) I am interested in this field of study <input type="checkbox"/>	لأنني استمتع بهذا المجال من الدراسة <input type="checkbox"/>
g) It was my parents'/family choice <input type="checkbox"/>	تماشياً مع رغبة الوالدين/الأهل <input type="checkbox"/>
h) I wanted to study in this institution <input type="checkbox"/>	لرغبتني في الالتحاق بهذه المؤسسة بالذات <input type="checkbox"/>
i) I had no other choice <input type="checkbox"/>	لعدم توفر البدائل <input type="checkbox"/>
j) No particular reason <input type="checkbox"/>	لا يوجد سبب معين <input type="checkbox"/>

k) Other (please specify)	□ أخرى (يرجى ذكر الأسباب الأخرى أدناه)
2 How long have you studied here (number of years)?	ما المدة التي درست هنا في هذه المؤسسة إلى الآن ( عدد الأعوام)؟
3 When do you plan to finish your studies (year)?	متى يتوقع أن تكمل دراستك (في أي عام)؟
4 Do you hope to exit with... (please tick ✓ one)	□ ما المؤهل الذي تخرج به؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ إجابة واحدة)
a) Diploma? □	□ دبلوم
b) Advanced Diploma? □	□ دبلوم متقدم
c) Bachelor Degree? □	□ البكالوريوس
d) Other ? □	□ أخرى

خطتك المستقبلية	
1 How do you plan to find a job? (please tick ✓ ALL that are appropriate)	كيف تخطط للحصول على وظيفة؟ (الرجاء اختيار ✓ جميع الاجابات المناسبة)
a) I already have a job □	□ لدي وظيفة حالياً
b) Through personal contacts □	□ عن طريق علاقاتي الشخصية
c) Newspapers □	□ عن طريق الجرائد
d) Register with manpower authority □	□ التسجيل في سجل القوى العاملة
e) Internet □	□ عن طريق الإنترنت
f) Employment agency □	□ عبر شركات التوظيف
g) Look for work outside Oman □	□ سأبحث عن عمل خارج السلطنة
h) Career's fair □	□ من معارض التوظيف
i) Sending out CVs □	□ سأقوم بتوزيع سيرتي الذاتية
j) Visiting companies □	□ سأقوم بزيارة الشركات
k) Word of mouth □	□ سأنشر حاجتي للعمل شفهيًا
l) I don't know □	□ لا أعلم
m) I'm not interested in finding a job □	□ ليست لدي رغبة للحصول على وظيفة
n) Other (please specify)	□ أخرى (يرجى التحديد)
2 What is important to you when looking for a job? (please tick ✓ ALL that apply to you)	ما الذي يهتمك في الوظيفة التي تسعى إليها؟ (الرجاء اختيار ✓ جميع الاجابات المناسبة)
a) Good salary □	□ الراتب الجيد
b) Long term contract □	□ الحصول على عقد طويل المدى
c) Job security □	□ الاستقرار الوظيفي
d) Opportunities for promotion □	□ توفر فرص للترقية
e) Health insurance □	□ التأمين الصحي
f) Location □	□ موقع العمل
g) Longer public holidays □	□ الإجازات العامة الطويلة
h) Regular performance assessment □	□ التقييم الوظيفي المنتظم
i) Shorter working hours □	□ ساعات عمل أقل
j) Challenging work environment □	□ بيئة عمل مليئة بالتحديات
k) Fair selection process □	□ أن تكون عملية اختيار الموظفين عادلة
l) Friendly place to work □	□ بيئة عمل ودية

m) Good retirement benefits	<input type="checkbox"/>	الحصول على منافع تقاعدية جيدة	<input type="checkbox"/>
n) Being given responsibility	<input type="checkbox"/>	أن يتم إعطائي مسؤولية في العمل	<input type="checkbox"/>
o) Opportunities for training	<input type="checkbox"/>	فرص التدريب	<input type="checkbox"/>
p) International working environment	<input type="checkbox"/>	بيئة عمل دولية (موظفين من دول مختلفة)	<input type="checkbox"/>
q) Chance to pursue higher studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	فرص الحصول على دراسات عليا	<input type="checkbox"/>
r) Easy work	<input type="checkbox"/>	عمل سهل	<input type="checkbox"/>
s) Little chance of being fired	<input type="checkbox"/>	احتمالات لتعرض للفصل من العمل قليلة	<input type="checkbox"/>
t) Having a job where I can make a difference	<input type="checkbox"/>	أن أعمل في مكان يمكنني أن أحدث فيه فرقاً	<input type="checkbox"/>
u) Having a job where I am appreciated	<input type="checkbox"/>	أن يتم تقديري في جهة العمل	<input type="checkbox"/>
v) It's in the government sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	أن تكون الوظيفة في القطاع الحكومي	<input type="checkbox"/>
w) It's linked to my studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	أن تكون الوظيفة ذات علاقة بدراساتي	<input type="checkbox"/>
x) I have no particular views, I just want any job	<input type="checkbox"/>	ليست لدي آراء محددة بل أبحث عن أية وظيفة	<input type="checkbox"/>
y) Other (please specify)		أخرى (يرجى التحديد)	<input type="checkbox"/>
3 What do you think you'll be doing in 5 years' time? (please tick ✓ ALL that you think will apply to you)		ماذا تتوقع أن تعمل بعد خمس سنوات من الآن؟ (الرجاء اختيار ✓ جميع الاجابات المناسبة)	
a) Raising children at home	<input type="checkbox"/>	تربية أبنائي بالمنزل	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Taking further studies	<input type="checkbox"/>	الدراسات العليا	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) In a management position	<input type="checkbox"/>	الحصول على وظيفة قيادية	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) In the same job as when I started work	<input type="checkbox"/>	في نفس الوظيفة التي بدأت بها حين التحاقني بسوق العمل	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Unemployed	<input type="checkbox"/>	باحث عن عمل	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) I'll have worked for more than one company	<input type="checkbox"/>	أن أكون قد عملت بأكثر من شركة	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Working for myself	<input type="checkbox"/>	أعمل بمشروعي التجاري الخاص	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Working for the government	<input type="checkbox"/>	أعمل في القطاع الحكومي	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Working in the private sector	<input type="checkbox"/>	أعمل في القطاع الخاص	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) Working for my family business	<input type="checkbox"/>	أعمل في تجارة العائلة	<input type="checkbox"/>
k) Living outside Oman	<input type="checkbox"/>	أعمل خارج السلطنة	<input type="checkbox"/>
l) No idea	<input type="checkbox"/>	ليست لدي فكرة	<input type="checkbox"/>
m) Other (please specify)		أخرى (يرجى التحديد)	<input type="checkbox"/>

## D Your views

رأيك

1 Please tick ✓ ONE answer

(A agree; SA slightly agree; SD slightly disagree; D disagree)

If you have no view, please leave blank

يرجى اختيار إجابة واحدة

(A = أوافق، SA = أوافق إلى حد ما، SD = لا أوافق إلى حد ما، D = لا أوافق)

إن لم يكن لديك رأي محدد، يرجى ترك الخانات فارغة

agree → disagree

		A	SA	SD	D		
a	My studies have prepared me for the workplace					a	لقد أعدتني دراستي للعمل
b	The government should provide jobs for all graduates					b	ينبغي على الحكومة توفير العمل لجميع الخريجين
c	I feel confident that I will find a job quickly					c	أنا واثق من حصولي على وظيفة سريعاً
d	It is easier to find a job in the government sector					d	من الأسهل الحصول على وظيفة في القطاع الحكومي

		A	SA	SD	D		
e	Getting a job depends on my abilities					الحصول على وظيفة يعتمد على قدراتي	e
f	It is easier for females to find work in the private sector					الحصول على وظيفة في القطاع الخاص أسهل للإناث	f
g	I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; I'll just wait and see					لم أقرر بعد ما سأفعله مستقبلاً، سانتظر إلى حينها	g
h	Underperforming employees should be sacked					ينبغي فصل الموظفين المقصرين في العمل من وظائفهم	h
i	Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA					إن جهات التوظيف تبحث عن مهارات العمل و ليس المعدل الدراسي العالي	i
j	Being successful depends on other people					نجاحي يعتمد على الآخرين	j
k	Colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work					إن الكليات و الجامعات لا تعمل ما يكفي لمساعدة الشباب في الحصول على وظيفة	k
l	New graduates should be able to get a job without experience					ينبغي أن يتمكن الخريجون الجدد من الحصول على وظيفة دون اشتراط الخبرة	l
m	I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies					لدي خطة واضحة لما سأعمله بعد التخرج	m
n	It's easier to find a job if you're Omani					من الأسهل الحصول على وظيفة إن كنت عمانياً	n
o	Employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic					إن أرباب العمل يؤمنون بأن العمانيين يعملون بجد و أن لديهم أخلاقيات عمل عالية	o
p	Getting a job depends on who you know					إن الحصول على وظيفة يعتمد على معارفك	p
q	I decided to study here after school because I didn't know what else to do					لقد قررت الدراسة في هذه المؤسسة التعليمية لأنني لم أعرف ما أفعل غير ذلك	q
r	People who are successful in life usually deserve it					إن الأشخاص الناجحين غالباً يستحقون هذا النجاح	r
s	More interesting jobs can be found in the private sector					يمكن الحصول على وظائف أكثر امتاعاً في القطاع الخاص	s
t	I'm studying this major in order to get a good job in the future					أقوم بدراسة التخصص الذي اخترته للحصول على وظيفة جيدة مستقبلاً	t
u	The government should be doing more to help young people start up their own business					ينبغي على الحكومة بذل المزيد من الجهد لمساعدة الشباب على انشاء مشاريعهم التجارية الخاصة	u
v	I don't mind what I do in the future; I just want a job					لا يهمني ما أفعله مستقبلاً، كل ما أريده هو الحصول على وظيفة	v
w	Graduate students should stay at home until they get a government job					ينبغي أن على الخريجين البقاء بالمنزل إلى أن يحصلوا على وظيفة حكومية	w
x	I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for the future					لقد دعمتني المؤسسة التي أدرس بها للاستعداد للمستقبل	x
y	Private companies in Oman should replace expatriates					ينبغي على شركات القطاع الخاص في السلطنة استبدال الموظفين الأجانب بعمانيين	y
z	If I don't find a job in the future it's my own fault					إن لم أحصل على وظيفة مستقبلاً فأنا السبب	z

		في ذلك	
2 To what extent does finding a job depend on the following? (please tick ✓ the ones you agree with)		الى أي مدى يعتمد حصولك على وظيفة على أي من التالي: (الرجاء اختيار ✓ جميع الاجابات المناسبة)	
a) Which part of Oman you come from	<input type="checkbox"/>	الولاية التي تنتمي إليها	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Wasta (knowing the right people)	<input type="checkbox"/>	الواسطة	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) Which institution you studied in	<input type="checkbox"/>	المؤسسة التعليمية التي درست بها	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) Family connections	<input type="checkbox"/>	العلاقات العائلية	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) Which tribe you belong to	<input type="checkbox"/>	القبيلة التي تنتمي إليها	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) Your gender	<input type="checkbox"/>	جنسك	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) Your own efforts	<input type="checkbox"/>	جهودك الذاتية	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) Having good grades	<input type="checkbox"/>	الحصول على درجات عالية	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) Having work experience	<input type="checkbox"/>	الخبرة في العمل	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) The subject you studied	<input type="checkbox"/>	التخصص الذي درسته	<input type="checkbox"/>
k) Your workplace skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	مهارتك الوظيفية	<input type="checkbox"/>
l) Your personality	<input type="checkbox"/>	شخصيتك	<input type="checkbox"/>
m) Having the right qualification	<input type="checkbox"/>	الحصول على المؤهلات المناسبة	<input type="checkbox"/>
n) Planning ahead	<input type="checkbox"/>	التخطيط المسبق	<input type="checkbox"/>
o) Good interview skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	مهارات المقابلة الشخصية الجيدة	<input type="checkbox"/>
p) Luck	<input type="checkbox"/>	الحظ	<input type="checkbox"/>
q) No idea	<input type="checkbox"/>	ليست لدي فكرة	<input type="checkbox"/>
r) Other (please specify)		أخرى (يرجى التحديد)	<input type="checkbox"/>

E About you		بياناتك	
1 Are you male or female? (please tick ✓ one)		هل أنت ذكر أم أنثى؟ (يرجى اختيار ✓ إجابة واحدة)	
a) Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	ذكر	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	أنثى	<input type="checkbox"/>
2 How old are you? (please write)		كم عمرك؟ (يرجى كتابة الإجابة)	
3 What is/was your father's occupation and where does/did he work? (please write)		ماذا يعمل /كان يعمل والدك و أين يعمل / كان يعمل؟ (يرجى كتابة الإجابة)	
4 What is/was your mother's occupation and where does/did she work? (please write)		ماذا تعمل /كانت تعمل والدتك و أين تعمل / كانت تعمل؟ (يرجى كتابة الإجابة)	
5 How many brothers and sisters do you have?		كم أخاً و أختاً لديك؟ (يرجى كتابة الإجابة)	

(please write)						
6 How would you describe yourself? Please tick ✓ ONE answer (A agree; SA slightly agree; SD slightly disagree; D disagree) If you have no view, please leave blank		كيف تصف نفسك؟ يرجى اختيار إجابة واحدة A) = أوافق، SA = أوافق إلى حد ما، SD = لا أوافق إلى حد ما، D = لا أوافق إن لم يكن لديك رأي محدد، يرجى ترك الخانات فارغة				
		agree → disagree				
		A	SA	SD	D	
a	I take my studies seriously					a أخذ دراستي بجدية
b	I know who to go to if I have a difficulty					b أعرف لمن ألبأ إن تعرضت لمشكلة ما
c	I learn new things easily					c أتعلم الأمور الجديدة بسهولة
d	I like to plan ahead					d أحب أن أخطط للأمور مسبقاً
e	I learn from my mistakes					e أتعلم من أخطائي
f	I find it easy to solve problems					f أستطيع حل المشاكل بسهولة
g	I find it difficult to finish things on time					g أجد صعوبة في إنجاز الأمور في الوقت المطلوب
h	I take each day as it comes					h أتعامل مع الأمور حسبما تطرأ
i	I don't like taking risks					i لا أحب المخاطرة
j	I set myself goals and targets					j أحدد لنفسي غايات و أهداف
k	I know what I want for my future					k أعرف ما أريده لمستقبلي
l	I don't give up easily					l لا أستسلم بسهولة
m	People often come to me if they have a difficulty					m غالباً ما يلجأ الناس إلي حين تواجههم مشكلة ما
n	I am confident in social situations					n أكون واثقاً من نفسي في المواقف الاجتماعية
o	I am optimistic about my future					o أنا متفائل بشأن مستقبلي

**Thank you for your support in completing this questionnaire**

شكراً على مساعدتكم في الإجابة على هذا الإستبيان

**APPENDIX G PROFILE OF QUESTIONNAIRE RESPONDENTS**

	Coll A	%	Coll B	%	Coll C	%	Private total	%	SQU	%	Total	%
<b>Total #</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>12.8</b>	<b>123</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>151</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>274</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Gender</b>												
male	10	4	25	9	11	4.0	46	17	63	23	109	40
female	21	8	32	12	24	9	77	28	88	32	165	60
<b>Education</b>												
govt school	18	7	47	17	22	8.0	87	32	119	43	206	75
private school	7	3	4	1	8	2.9	19	7	13	5	32	12
both	6	2	6	2	5	1.8	17	6	19	7	36	13
Muscat-based	20	7	6	2	21	7.7	47	17	35	13	82	30
Outside Muscat	6	2	8	3	12	4.4	26	9	35	13	61	22
hostel	7	3	8	3	3	1.1	18	7	82	30	100	36
rented	2	1	8	3	5	1.8	15	5	57	21	72	26
family	21	8	40	15	25	9.1	86	31	37	14	123	45
friends	1	0	1	0	1	0.4	3	1	52	19	55	20
other	0	0	0	0	1	0.4	1	0	0	0	1	0
employment	7	3	7	3	6	2.2	20	7	3	1	23	8
<b>Funding</b>												
family	22	8	40	15	18	6.6	80	29	13	5	93	34
government	2	1	11	4	5	1.8	18	7	135	49	153	56
self	5	2	2	1	3	1.1	10	4	2	1	12	4
other	2	1	4	1	9	3.3	15	5	0	0	15	5
<b>Exit qualification</b>												
Diploma	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	1	0	0	2	1

Tess Goodliffe

Doctorate in Social Sciences

Advanced Diploma	0	0	5	2	3	1.1	8	3	0	0	8	3
Bachelor Degree	28	10	44	16	30	10.9	102	37	139	51	241	88
Other	3	1	3	1	2	0.7	8	3	10	4	18	7
Family ≥5	21	8	34	12	21	7.7	76	28	129	47	205	75



## APPENDIX H QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS

		Private HEIs (n=123)				SQU (n=151)				Total (n=274)			
		M	F	T	%	M	F	T	%	M	F	T	%
<b>B1 Why did you choose to study in this field?</b>													
<b>a</b>	Easy to pass	5	9	14	11.4	4	6	10	6.6	9	15	24	8.76
<b>b</b>	Good job prospects in the private sector	25	36	61	49.6	41	51	92	60.9	66	87	153	55.8
<b>c</b>	Good job prospects in the government	20	32	52	42.3	28	37	65	43.0	48	69	117	42.7
<b>d</b>	It will help me to open my own business	16	27	43	35	23	33	56	37.1	39	60	99	36.1
<b>e</b>	Oman needs people in this field	14	26	40	32.5	15	32	47	31.1	29	58	87	31.8
<b>f</b>	I am interested in this field of study	15	33	48	39	35	53	88	58.3	50	86	136	49.6
<b>g</b>	It was my parents'/family choice	7	10	17	13.8	2	6	8	5.3	9	16	25	9.12
<b>h</b>	I wanted to study in this institution	7	14	21	17.1	16	24	40	26.5	23	38	61	22.3
<b>i</b>	I had no other choice	3	13	16	13	13	12	25	16.6	16	25	41	15
<b>j</b>	No particular reason	5	3	8	6.5	8	5	13	8.6	13	8	21	7.66
<b>k</b>	Other (please specify)	0	2	2	1.63	0	2	2	1.3	0	4	4	1.46
<b>C1 How do you plan to find a job?</b>													
<b>a</b>	I already have a job	5	2	7	5.69	2	3	5	3.3	7	5	12	4.38
<b>b</b>	Through personal contacts	19	24	43	35	21	28	49	32.5	40	52	92	33.6
<b>c</b>	Newspapers	16	25	41	33.3	31	45	76	50.3	47	70	117	42.7
<b>d</b>	Register with manpower authority	25	51	76	61.8	48	60	108	71.5	73	111	184	67.2
<b>e</b>	Internet	18	35	53	43.1	37	53	90	59.6	55	88	143	52.2
<b>f</b>	Employment agency	15	25	40	32.5	24	23	47	31.1	39	48	87	31.8
<b>g</b>	Look for work outside Oman	5	1	6	4.88	9	3	12	7.9	14	4	18	6.57
<b>h</b>	Career's fair	17	28	45	36.6	29	39	68	45.0	46	67	113	41.2
<b>i</b>	Sending out CVs	21	45	66	53.7	36	53	89	58.9	57	98	155	56.6
<b>j</b>	Visiting companies	17	21	38	30.9	26	20	46	30.5	43	41	84	30.7
<b>k</b>	Word of mouth	3	5	8	6.5	10	9	19	12.6	13	14	27	9.85

<b>l</b>	I don't know	2	6	8	6.5	2	6	8	5.3	4	12	16	5.84
<b>m</b>	I'm not interested in finding a job	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.7	0	1	1	0.36
<b>n</b>	Other (please specify)	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0.7	0	1	1	0.36
<b>C2 What is important to you when looking for a job?</b>													
<b>a</b>	Good salary	30	54	84	68.3	52	69	121	80.1	82	123	205	74.8
<b>b</b>	Long term contract	11	14	25	20.3	14	16	30	19.9	25	30	55	20.1
<b>c</b>	Job security	29	49	78	63.4	43	62	105	69.5	72	111	183	66.8
<b>d</b>	Opportunities for promotion	25	44	69	56.1	43	49	92	60.9	68	93	161	58.8
<b>e</b>	Health insurance	22	40	62	50.4	32	45	77	51.0	54	85	139	50.7
<b>f</b>	Location	17	35	52	42.3	34	57	91	60.3	51	92	143	52.2
<b>g</b>	Longer public holidays	9	12	21	17.1	8	14	22	14.6	17	26	43	15.7
<b>h</b>	Regular performance assessment	19	19	38	30.9	23	21	44	29.1	42	40	82	29.9
<b>i</b>	Shorter working hours	7	24	31	25.2	11	26	37	24.5	18	50	68	24.8
<b>j</b>	Challenging work environment	19	32	51	41.5	24	33	57	37.7	43	65	108	39.4
<b>k</b>	Fair selection process	19	28	47	38.2	28	37	65	43.0	47	65	112	40.9
<b>l</b>	Friendly place to work	17	33	50	40.7	33	51	84	55.6	50	84	134	48.9
<b>m</b>	Good retirement benefits	17	22	39	31.7	27	34	61	40.4	44	56	100	36.5
<b>n</b>	Being given responsibility	18	32	50	40.7	27	43	70	46.4	45	75	120	43.8
<b>o</b>	Opportunities for training	23	35	58	47.2	35	44	79	52.3	58	79	137	50
<b>p</b>	International working environment	12	23	35	28.5	18	37	55	36.4	30	60	90	32.8
<b>q</b>	Chance to pursue higher studies	23	37	60	48.8	31	37	68	45.0	54	74	128	46.7
<b>r</b>	Easy work	7	17	24	19.5	6	15	21	13.9	13	32	45	16.4
<b>s</b>	Little chance of being fired	4	4	8	6.5	12	14	26	17.2	16	18	34	12.4
<b>t</b>	Having a job where I can make a difference	19	25	44	35.8	28	41	69	45.7	47	66	113	41.2
<b>u</b>	Having a job where I am appreciated	18	37	55	44.7	34	55	89	58.9	52	92	144	52.6
<b>v</b>	It's in the government sector	14	19	33	26.8	8	24	32	21.2	22	43	65	23.7
<b>w</b>	It's linked to my studies	22	42	64	52	32	53	85	56.3	54	95	149	54.4
<b>x</b>	I have no particular views, I just want any job	1	4	5	4.07	0	1	1	0.7	1	5	6	2.19
<b>y</b>	Other (please specify)	0	0	0	0	2	1	3	2.0	2	1	3	1.09
<b>C3 What do you think you'll be doing in 5 years' time?</b>													

<b>a</b>	Raising children at home	5	14	19	15.4	4	16	20	13.2	9	30	39	14.2
<b>b</b>	Taking further studies	18	39	57	46.3	29	29	58	38.4	47	68	115	42
<b>c</b>	In a management position	22	38	60	48.8	31	44	75	49.7	53	82	135	49.3
<b>d</b>	In the same job as when I started work	4	4	8	6.5	10	8	18	11.9	14	12	26	9.49
<b>e</b>	Unemployed	2	3	5	4.07	1	5	6	4.0	3	8	11	4.01
<b>f</b>	I'll have worked for more than one company	8	10	18	14.6	13	14	27	17.9	21	24	45	16.4
<b>g</b>	Working for myself	18	28	46	37.4	27	33	60	39.7	45	61	106	38.7
<b>h</b>	Working for the government	14	22	36	29.3	14	18	32	21.2	28	40	68	24.8
<b>i</b>	Working in the private sector	11	9	20	16.3	24	21	45	29.8	35	30	65	23.7
<b>j</b>	Working for my family business	4	5	9	7.32	7	5	12	7.9	11	10	21	7.66
<b>k</b>	Living outside Oman	2	9	11	8.94	2	3	5	3.3	4	12	16	5.84
<b>l</b>	No idea	2	8	10	8.13	2	5	7	4.6	4	13	17	6.2
<b>m</b>	Other (please specify)	1	1	2	1.63	2	0	2	1.3	3	1	4	1.46
<b>D2 To what extent does finding a job depend on the following?</b>													
<b>a</b>	Which part of Oman you come from	14	29	43	35	12	27	39	25.8	26	56	82	29.9
<b>b</b>	Wasta (knowing the right people)	26	35	61	49.6	34	54	88	58.3	60	89	149	54.4
<b>c</b>	Which institution you studied in	20	35	55	44.7	42	56	98	64.9	62	91	153	55.8
<b>d</b>	Family connections	21	23	44	35.8	23	28	51	33.8	44	51	95	34.7
<b>e</b>	Which tribe you belong to	8	4	12	9.76	7	5	12	7.9	15	9	24	8.76
<b>f</b>	Your gender	13	20	33	26.8	14	22	36	23.8	27	42	69	25.2
<b>g</b>	Your own efforts	28	51	79	64.2	47	66	113	74.8	75	117	192	70.1
<b>h</b>	Having good grades	26	50	76	61.8	33	51	84	55.6	59	101	160	58.4
<b>i</b>	Having work experience	33	56	89	72.4	47	59	106	70.2	80	115	195	71.2
<b>j</b>	The subject you studied	29	59	88	71.5	39	73	112	74.2	68	132	200	73
<b>k</b>	Your workplace skills	30	49	79	64.2	43	52	95	62.9	73	101	174	63.5
<b>l</b>	Your personality	31	45	76	61.8	43	62	105	69.5	74	107	181	66.1
<b>m</b>	Having the right qualification	23	43	66	53.7	30	46	76	50.3	53	89	142	51.8
<b>n</b>	Planning ahead	11	19	30	24.4	18	24	42	27.8	29	43	72	26.3
<b>o</b>	Good interview skills	24	41	65	52.8	45	62	107	70.9	69	103	172	62.8
<b>p</b>	Luck	16	25	41	33.3	16	29	45	29.8	32	54	86	31.4

<b>q</b>	No idea	1	4	5	4.07	1	0	1	0.7	2	4	6	2.19
<b>r</b>	Other (please specify)	1	1	2	1.63	0	0	0	0.0	1	1	2	0.73

<b>D1 Your views</b>		<b>Total results (n=274)</b>							
		A	%	SA	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>a</b>	My studies have prepared me for the workplace	121	44.2	99	36.1	27	9.9	8	2.9
<b>b</b>	The government should provide jobs for all graduates	201	73.4	48	17.5	15	5.5	6	2.2
<b>c</b>	I feel confident that I will find a job quickly	62	22.6	105	38.3	59	22	31	11
<b>d</b>	It is easier to find a job in the government sector	30	10.9	67	24.5	103	38	59	22
<b>e</b>	Getting a job depends on my abilities	123	44.9	105	38.3	24	8.8	10	3.6
<b>f</b>	It is easier for females to find work in the private sector	49	17.9	69	25.2	79	29	61	22
<b>g</b>	I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; I'll just wait and see	42	15.3	38	13.9	72	26	100	36
<b>h</b>	Underperforming employees should be sacked	63	23	52	19	98	36	46	17
<b>i</b>	Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA	87	31.8	90	32.8	45	16	38	14
<b>j</b>	Being successful depends on other people	17	6.2	32	11.7	69	25	144	53
<b>k</b>	Colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work	79	28.8	85	31	75	27	28	10
<b>l</b>	New graduates should be able to get a job without experience	154	56.2	78	28.5	24	8.8	10	3.6
<b>m</b>	I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies	82	29.9	102	37.2	45	16	24	8.8
<b>n</b>	It's easier to find a job if you're Omani	52	19	85	31	87	32	43	16
<b>o</b>	Employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic	62	22.6	80	29.2	81	30	46	17
<b>p</b>	Getting a job depends on who you know	77	28.1	106	38.7	57	21	24	8.8
<b>q</b>	I decided to study here after school because I didn't know what else to do	43	15.7	31	11.3	60	22	122	45
<b>r</b>	People who are successful in life usually deserve it	162	59.1	74	27	20	7.3	6	2.2
<b>s</b>	More interesting jobs can be found in the private sector	106	38.7	101	36.9	38	14	15	5.5
<b>t</b>	I'm studying this major in order to get a good job in the future	167	60.9	61	22.3	26	9.5	7	2.6
<b>u</b>	The government should be doing more to help young people start up their own business	191	69.7	60	21.9	8	2.9	7	2.6
<b>v</b>	I don't mind what I do in the future; I just want a job	44	16.1	65	23.7	76	28	79	29
<b>w</b>	Graduate students should stay at home until they get a government job	15	5.47	14	5.11	61	22	172	63
<b>x</b>	I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for the future	67	24.5	82	29.9	72	26	41	15
<b>y</b>	Private companies in Oman should replace expatriates	108	39.4	88	32.1	44	16	18	6.6
<b>z</b>	If I don't find a job in the future it's my own fault	36	13.1	41	15	78	28	108	39
<b>D1 Your views</b>		<b>Total male (n=109)</b>							

	A	%	SA	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>a</b> My studies have prepared me for the workplace	41	37.6	44	40.4	12	11	6	5.5
<b>b</b> The government should provide jobs for all graduates	72	66.1	22	20.2	12	11	3	2.75
<b>c</b> I feel confident that I will find a job quickly	29	26.6	34	31.2	30	27.5	10	9.17
<b>d</b> It is easier to find a job in the government sector	15	13.8	35	32.1	40	36.7	16	14.7
<b>e</b> Getting a job depends on my abilities	39	35.8	52	47.7	9	8.26	4	3.67
<b>f</b> It is easier for females to find work in the private sector	28	25.7	28	25.7	33	30.3	15	13.8
<b>g</b> I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; I'll just wait and see	20	18.3	21	19.3	24	22	39	35.8
<b>h</b> Underperforming employees should be sacked	29	26.6	18	16.5	44	40.4	17	15.6
<b>i</b> Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA	26	23.9	41	37.6	19	17.4	15	13.8
<b>j</b> Being successful depends on other people	12	11	16	14.7	25	22.9	53	48.6
<b>k</b> Colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work	35	32.1	36	33	29	26.6	7	6.42
<b>l</b> New graduates should be able to get a job without experience	57	52.3	35	32.1	8	7.34	6	5.5
<b>m</b> I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies	34	31.2	44	40.4	20	18.3	6	5.5
<b>n</b> It's easier to find a job if you're Omani	21	19.3	33	30.3	35	32.1	17	15.6
<b>o</b> Employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic	26	23.9	28	25.7	34	31.2	21	19.3
<b>p</b> Getting a job depends on who you know	30	27.5	41	37.6	25	22.9	7	6.42
<b>q</b> I decided to study here after school because I didn't know what else to do	18	16.5	18	16.5	23	21.1	44	40.4
<b>r</b> People who are successful in life usually deserve it	59	54.1	36	33	6	5.5	4	3.67
<b>s</b> More interesting jobs can be found in the private sector	39	35.8	44	40.4	14	12.8	7	6.42
<b>t</b> I'm studying this major in order to get a good job in the future	56	51.4	30	27.5	15	13.8	2	1.83
<b>u</b> The government should be doing more to help young people start up their own business	70	64.2	27	24.8	4	3.67	5	4.59
<b>v</b> I don't mind what I do in the future; I just want a job	22	20.2	24	22	28	25.7	31	28.4
<b>w</b> Graduate students should stay at home until they get a government job	9	8.26	9	8.26	21	19.3	67	61.5
<b>x</b> I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for the future	20	18.3	30	27.5	37	33.9	18	16.5
<b>y</b> Private companies in Oman should replace expatriates	43	39.4	40	36.7	13	11.9	8	7.34
<b>z</b> If I don't find a job in the future it's my own fault	18	16.5	25	22.9	35	32.1	28	25.7
<b>D1 Your views</b>	<b>Total female (n=165)</b>							
	A	%	SA	%	SD	%	D	%
<b>a</b> My studies have prepared me for the workplace	80	48.5	55	33.3	15	9.09	2	1.21
<b>b</b> The government should provide jobs for all graduates	129	78.2	26	15.8	3	1.82	3	1.82

<b>c</b>	I feel confident that I will find a job quickly	33	20	71	43	29	17.6	21	12.7
<b>d</b>	It is easier to find a job in the government sector	15	9.09	32	19.4	63	38.2	43	26.1
<b>e</b>	Getting a job depends on my abilities	84	50.9	53	32.1	15	9.09	6	3.64
<b>f</b>	It is easier for females to find work in the private sector	21	12.7	41	24.8	46	27.9	46	27.9
<b>g</b>	I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; I'll just wait and see	22	13.3	17	10.3	48	29.1	61	37
<b>h</b>	Underperforming employees should be sacked	34	20.6	34	20.6	54	32.7	29	17.6
<b>i</b>	Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA	61	37	49	29.7	26	15.8	23	13.9
<b>j</b>	Being successful depends on other people	5	3.03	16	9.7	44	26.7	91	55.2
<b>k</b>	Colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work	44	26.7	49	29.7	46	27.9	21	12.7
<b>l</b>	New graduates should be able to get a job without experience	97	58.8	43	26.1	16	9.7	4	2.42
<b>m</b>	I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies	48	29.1	58	35.2	25	15.2	18	10.9
<b>n</b>	It's easier to find a job if you're Omani	31	18.8	52	31.5	52	31.5	26	15.8
<b>o</b>	Employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic	36	21.8	52	31.5	47	28.5	25	15.2
<b>p</b>	Getting a job depends on who you know	47	28.5	65	39.4	32	19.4	17	10.3
<b>q</b>	I decided to study here after school because I didn't know what else to do	25	15.2	13	7.88	37	22.4	78	47.3
<b>r</b>	People who are successful in life usually deserve it	103	62.4	38	23	14	8.48	2	1.21
<b>s</b>	More interesting jobs can be found in the private sector	67	40.6	57	34.5	24	14.5	8	4.85
<b>t</b>	I'm studying this major in order to get a good job in the future	111	67.3	31	18.8	11	6.67	5	3.03
<b>u</b>	The government should be doing more to help young people start up their own business	121	73.3	33	20	4	2.42	2	1.21
<b>v</b>	I don't mind what I do in the future; I just want a job	22	13.3	41	24.8	48	29.1	48	29.1
<b>w</b>	Graduate students should stay at home until they get a government job	6	3.64	5	3.03	40	24.2	105	63.6
<b>x</b>	I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for the future	47	28.5	52	31.5	35	21.2	23	13.9
<b>y</b>	Private companies in Oman should replace expatriates	65	39.4	48	29.1	31	18.8	10	6.06
<b>z</b>	If I don't find a job in the future it's my own fault	18	10.9	16	9.7	43	26.1	80	48.5
<b>D1 Your views</b>		<b>Total SQU (n=151)</b>							
		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	My studies have prepared me for the workplace	57	37.7	66	43.71	18	11.9	3	1.99
<b>b</b>	The government should provide jobs for all graduates	101	66.9	34	22.52	11	7.3	3	1.99
<b>c</b>	I feel confident that I will find a job quickly	37	24.5	56	37.09	31	20.5	21	13.9
<b>d</b>	It is easier to find a job in the government sector	14	9.3	39	25.83	63	41.7	30	19.9
<b>e</b>	Getting a job depends on my abilities	66	43.7	60	39.74	14	9.3	6	3.97

<b>f</b>	It is easier for females to find work in the private sector	18	11.9	38	25.17	56	37.1	32	21.2
<b>g</b>	I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; I'll just wait and see	17	11.3	20	13.25	48	31.8	56	37.1
<b>h</b>	Underperforming employees should be sacked	34	22.5	28	18.54	59	39.1	26	17.2
<b>i</b>	Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA	53	35.1	43	28.48	24	15.9	27	17.9
<b>j</b>	Being successful depends on other people	12	7.9	23	15.23	42	27.8	70	46.4
<b>k</b>	Colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work	46	30.5	42	27.81	47	31.1	12	7.95
<b>l</b>	New graduates should be able to get a job without experience	91	60.3	42	27.81	12	7.9	4	2.65
<b>m</b>	I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies	40	26.5	65	43.05	22	14.6	16	10.6
<b>n</b>	It's easier to find a job if you're Omani	22	14.6	52	34.44	46	30.5	27	17.9
<b>o</b>	Employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic	22	14.6	44	29.14	52	34.4	31	20.5
<b>p</b>	Getting a job depends on who you know	42	27.8	67	44.37	31	20.5	9	5.96
<b>q</b>	I decided to study here after school because I didn't know what else to do	20	13.2	11	7.285	39	25.8	74	49
<b>r</b>	People who are successful in life usually deserve it	91	60.3	46	30.46	7	4.6	3	1.99
<b>s</b>	More interesting jobs can be found in the private sector	70	46.4	54	35.76	18	11.9	5	3.31
<b>t</b>	I'm studying this major in order to get a good job in the future	91	60.3	36	23.84	17	11.3	4	2.65
<b>u</b>	The government should be doing more to help young people start up their own business	105	69.5	37	24.5	4	2.6	3	1.99
<b>v</b>	I don't mind what I do in the future; I just want a job	23	15.2	34	22.52	50	33.1	41	27.2
<b>w</b>	Graduate students should stay at home until they get a government job	8	5.3	5	3.311	38	25.2	97	64.2
<b>x</b>	I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for the future	41	27.2	50	33.11	37	24.5	19	12.6
<b>y</b>	Private companies in Oman should replace expatriates	54	35.8	53	35.1	28	18.5	8	5.3
<b>z</b>	If I don't find a job in the future it's my own fault	20	13.2	26	17.22	45	29.8	57	37.7
<b>D1 Your views</b>		<b>Total Private HEIs (n=123)</b>							
		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	My studies have prepared me for the workplace	64	52	33	26.8	9	7.32	5	4.07
<b>b</b>	The government should provide jobs for all graduates	100	81.3	14	11.4	4	3.25	3	2.44
<b>c</b>	I feel confident that I will find a job quickly	25	20.3	49	39.8	28	22.8	10	8.13
<b>d</b>	It is easier to find a job in the government sector	16	13	28	22.8	40	32.5	29	23.6
<b>e</b>	Getting a job depends on my abilities	57	46.3	45	36.6	10	8.13	4	3.25
<b>f</b>	It is easier for females to find work in the private sector	31	25.2	31	25.2	23	18.7	29	23.6
<b>g</b>	I haven't decided what I'm going to do in the future; I'll just wait and see	25	20.3	18	14.6	24	19.5	44	35.8
<b>h</b>	Underperforming employees should be sacked	29	23.6	24	19.5	39	31.7	20	16.3

<b>i</b>	Employers look for skills rather than a good GPA	34	27.6	47	38.2	21	17.1	11	8.94
<b>j</b>	Being successful depends on other people	5	4.07	9	7.32	27	22	74	60.2
<b>k</b>	Colleges and universities don't do enough to help young people find work	33	26.8	43	35	28	22.8	16	13
<b>l</b>	New graduates should be able to get a job without experience	63	51.2	36	29.3	12	9.76	6	4.88
<b>m</b>	I have a clear plan for what I'm going to do after my studies	42	34.1	37	30.1	23	18.7	8	6.5
<b>n</b>	It's easier to find a job if you're Omani	30	24.4	33	26.8	41	33.3	16	13
<b>o</b>	Employers believe that Omanis are hard-working and have a strong work ethic	40	32.5	36	29.3	29	23.6	15	12.2
<b>p</b>	Getting a job depends on who you know	35	28.5	39	31.7	26	21.1	15	12.2
<b>q</b>	I decided to study here after school because I didn't know what else to do	23	18.7	20	16.3	21	17.1	48	39
<b>r</b>	People who are successful in life usually deserve it	71	57.7	28	22.8	13	10.6	3	2.44
<b>s</b>	More interesting jobs can be found in the private sector	36	29.3	47	38.2	20	16.3	10	8.13
<b>t</b>	I'm studying this major in order to get a good job in the future	76	61.8	25	20.3	9	7.32	3	2.44
<b>u</b>	The government should be doing more to help young people start up their own business	86	69.9	23	18.7	4	3.25	4	3.25
<b>v</b>	I don't mind what I do in the future; I just want a job	21	17.1	31	25.2	26	21.1	38	30.9
<b>w</b>	Graduate students should stay at home until they get a government job	7	5.69	9	7.32	23	18.7	75	61
<b>x</b>	I have had support from my College in helping me prepare for the future	26	21.1	32	26	35	28.5	22	17.9
<b>y</b>	Private companies in Oman should replace expatriates	54	43.9	35	28.5	16	13	10	8.13
<b>z</b>	If I don't find a job in the future it's my own fault	16	13	15	12.2	33	26.8	51	41.5
<b>E6 About you</b>		<b>Total results (n=274)</b>							
<b>How would you describe yourself?</b>		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	I take my studies seriously	154	56.2	91	33.2	13	4.7	5	1.8
<b>b</b>	I know who to go to if I have a difficulty	119	43.4	97	35.4	31	11	13	4.7
<b>c</b>	I learn new things easily	104	38	123	44.9	26	9.5	6	2.2
<b>d</b>	I like to plan ahead	143	52.2	95	34.7	15	5.5	7	2.6
<b>e</b>	I learn from my mistakes	153	55.8	83	30.3	13	4.7	4	1.5
<b>f</b>	I find it easy to solve problems	61	22.3	131	47.8	46	17	11	4
<b>g</b>	I find it difficult to finish things on time	42	15.3	86	31.4	82	30	40	15
<b>h</b>	I take each day as it comes	84	30.7	122	44.5	36	13	13	4.7
<b>i</b>	I don't like taking risks	57	20.8	82	29.9	63	23	51	19
<b>j</b>	I set myself goals and targets	144	52.6	87	31.8	14	5.1	6	2.2
<b>k</b>	I know what I want for my future	136	49.6	84	30.7	22	8	12	4.4



<b>l</b>	I don't give up easily	135	49.3	84	30.7	22	8	9	3.3
<b>m</b>	People often come to me if they have a difficulty	95	34.7	112	40.9	36	13	10	3.6
<b>n</b>	I am confident in social situations	138	50.4	94	34.3	20	7.3	6	2.2
<b>o</b>	I am optimistic about my future	168	61.3	62	22.6	13	4.7	11	4
<b>E6 About you</b>		<b>Total male (n=109)</b>							
<b>How would you describe yourself?</b>		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	I take my studies seriously	53	48.6	43	39.4	9	8.26	2	1.83
<b>b</b>	I know who to go to if I have a difficulty	46	42.2	37	33.9	18	16.5	5	4.59
<b>c</b>	I learn new things easily	47	43.1	45	41.3	13	11.9	2	1.83
<b>d</b>	I like to plan ahead	54	49.5	42	38.5	7	6.42	4	3.67
<b>e</b>	I learn from my mistakes	62	56.9	28	25.7	10	9.17	2	1.83
<b>f</b>	I find it easy to solve problems	26	23.9	48	44	21	19.3	5	4.59
<b>g</b>	I find it difficult to finish things on time	18	16.5	39	35.8	31	28.4	15	13.8
<b>h</b>	I take each day as it comes	31	28.4	52	47.7	12	11	8	7.34
<b>i</b>	I don't like taking risks	24	22	36	33	26	23.9	19	17.4
<b>j</b>	I set myself goals and targets	53	48.6	38	34.9	7	6.42	4	3.67
<b>k</b>	I know what I want for my future	53	48.6	36	33	12	11	5	4.59
<b>l</b>	I don't give up easily	59	54.1	27	24.8	13	11.9	2	1.83
<b>m</b>	People often come to me if they have a difficulty	31	28.4	46	42.2	21	19.3	7	6.42
<b>n</b>	I am confident in social situations	54	49.5	37	33.9	12	11	3	2.75
<b>o</b>	I am optimistic about my future	68	62.4	27	24.8	4	3.67	4	3.67
<b>E6 About you</b>		<b>Total female (n=165)</b>							
<b>How would you describe yourself?</b>		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	I take my studies seriously	101	61.2	48	29.1	4	2.42	3	1.82
<b>b</b>	I know who to go to if I have a difficulty	73	44.2	60	36.4	13	7.88	8	4.85
<b>c</b>	I learn new things easily	57	34.5	78	47.3	13	7.88	4	2.42
<b>d</b>	I like to plan ahead	89	53.9	53	32.1	8	4.85	3	1.82
<b>e</b>	I learn from my mistakes	91	55.2	55	33.3	3	1.82	2	1.21
<b>f</b>	I find it easy to solve problems	35	21.2	83	50.3	25	15.2	6	3.64
<b>g</b>	I find it difficult to finish things on time	24	14.5	47	28.5	51	30.9	25	15.2
<b>h</b>	I take each day as it comes	53	32.1	70	42.4	24	14.5	5	3.03
<b>i</b>	I don't like taking risks	33	20	46	27.9	37	22.4	32	19.4
<b>j</b>	I set myself goals and targets	91	55.2	49	29.7	7	4.24	2	1.21
<b>k</b>	I know what I want for my future	83	50.3	48	29.1	10	6.06	7	4.24

<b>l</b>	I don't give up easily	76	46.1	57	34.5	9	5.45	7	4.24
<b>m</b>	People often come to me if they have a difficulty	64	38.8	66	40	15	9.09	3	1.82
<b>n</b>	I am confident in social situations	84	50.9	57	34.5	8	4.85	3	1.82
<b>o</b>	I am optimistic about my future	100	60.6	35	21.2	9	5.45	7	4.24
<b>E6 About you</b>		<b>Total SQU (n=151)</b>							
<b>How would you describe yourself?</b>		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	I take my studies seriously	71	47.0	60	39.74	11	7.3	1	0.66
<b>b</b>	I know who to go to if I have a difficulty	60	39.7	58	38.41	20	13.2	5	3.31
<b>c</b>	I learn new things easily	51	33.8	72	47.68	17	11.3	2	1.32
<b>d</b>	I like to plan ahead	73	48.3	58	38.41	11	7.3	1	0.66
<b>e</b>	I learn from my mistakes	71	47.0	54	35.76	11	7.3	1	0.66
<b>f</b>	I find it easy to solve problems	35	23.2	65	43.05	29	19.2	6	3.97
<b>g</b>	I find it difficult to finish things on time	26	17.2	46	30.46	52	34.4	14	9.27
<b>h</b>	I take each day as it comes	41	27.2	74	49.01	14	9.3	11	7.28
<b>i</b>	I don't like taking risks	27	17.9	48	31.79	37	24.5	27	17.9
<b>j</b>	I set myself goals and targets	72	47.7	57	37.75	8	5.3	1	0.66
<b>k</b>	I know what I want for my future	63	41.7	51	33.77	15	9.9	7	4.64
<b>l</b>	I don't give up easily	66	43.7	51	33.77	14	9.3	5	3.31
<b>m</b>	People often come to me if they have a difficulty	49	32.5	68	45.03	17	11.3	5	3.31
<b>n</b>	I am confident in social situations	63	41.7	58	38.41	16	10.6	4	2.65
<b>o</b>	I am optimistic about my future	86	57.0	39	25.83	6	4.0	7	4.64
<b>E6 About you</b>		<b>Total Private HEIs (n=123)</b>							
<b>How would you describe yourself?</b>		<b>A</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SA</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>D</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>a</b>	I take my studies seriously	83	67.5	31	25.2	2	1.63	4	3.25
<b>b</b>	I know who to go to if I have a difficulty	59	48	39	31.7	11	8.94	8	6.5
<b>c</b>	I learn new things easily	53	43.1	51	41.5	9	7.32	4	3.25
<b>d</b>	I like to plan ahead	70	56.9	37	30.1	4	3.25	6	4.88
<b>e</b>	I learn from my mistakes	82	66.7	29	23.6	2	1.63	3	2.44
<b>f</b>	I find it easy to solve problems	26	21.1	66	53.7	17	13.8	5	4.07
<b>g</b>	I find it difficult to finish things on time	16	13	40	32.5	30	24.4	26	21.1
<b>h</b>	I take each day as it comes	43	35	48	39	22	17.9	2	1.63
<b>i</b>	I don't like taking risks	30	24.4	34	27.6	26	21.1	24	19.5
<b>j</b>	I set myself goals and targets	72	58.5	30	24.4	6	4.88	5	4.07
<b>k</b>	I know what I want for my future	73	59.3	33	26.8	7	5.69	5	4.07

<b>l</b>	I don't give up easily	69	56.1	33	26.8	8	6.5	4	3.25
<b>m</b>	People often come to me if they have a difficulty	46	37.4	44	35.8	19	15.4	5	4.07
<b>n</b>	I am confident in social situations	75	61	36	29.3	4	3.25	2	1.63
<b>o</b>	I am optimistic about my future	82	66.7	23	18.7	7	5.69	4	3.25