



**NATIONAL VOCATIONAL
EDUCATION AND TRAINING POLICY**



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INTRODUCTION

The NCFHE together with multiple stakeholders has embarked coordinating the task to provide a holistic yet concise documentation of the current VET sector in Malta, with an outlook upon establishing a way forward with measurable goals for this education sector. Malta has seen a continuous investment in vocational education and training over the past years and the establishment and strengthening of VET providers over the past decade.

Vocational education and training has become an instrumental factor to both the social and economic needs of our country. It has opened up opportunities to a vast range of individuals who can further their education and skills through VET courses. On the other hand, it has also provided a solid approach towards labour market exigencies by shaping skills development in accordance to the needs of specific sectors.

VET has increasingly become a priority on a European level particularly through the Copenhagen Process¹ which emanated from the scopes of the Lisbon Agenda in recognizing the importance of developed high quality VET to promote social inclusion, cohesion, mobility, employability and competitiveness. In 2002 the European Council resolved to promote enhanced European cooperation in VET. Specific emphasis was given to quality assurance in VET which would promote the VET sector as a whole in terms of both students and employers gauging their trust and thus increasing attractiveness to vocational education.

The Bruges Communiqué` (2010) placed emphasis on Ministers of Education and Training through enhanced cooperation in vocational education and training. The Communiqué` lists 22 and 37 short-term deliverables for EU Member States and EU Agencies respectively for the period 2011-2014 with long-term strategic objectives targeting 2020 goals.

VET is described as having a dual objective – that of contributing to employability and economic growth, and responding to broader societal challenges, in particular promoting social cohesion.² Prominence is given to the quality of VET, increasing mobility and ensuring that education and training is tied and leads to employability. A further emphasis is on the creation of a common credit system for VET (ECVET) which encourages permeability between education and training, as well as ensuring a trustable quality mechanism for VET across the continent (EQAVET).

On a national level, the establishment of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and its referencing to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) in 2009, was inevitably a concrete cornerstone towards the enhancement of VET. The MQF pushed forward parity of esteem between vocational education and general or academic education, as well as making possible permeability between VET and HE which enhances lifelong learning.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/copenhagen-declaration_en.pdf

² http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/vocational-policy/doc/brugescom_en.pdf

These developments have resulted in a number of achievements within the VET sector and VET policy development. VET qualifications are now giving access to a number of courses at the higher levels of the MQF. The provision of VET degrees and consequently the number of successful graduates are on the increase. VET in Malta is also providing opportunities for learners without any qualification to access and further their education through Initial VET (IVET) qualifications. IVET starts at the lowest level of the MQF (Level 1) and provides a variety of routes for tertiary education attainment.

Moreover Malta has been at the forefront in the implementation of both EQAVET and ECVET. A quality assurance framework for VET is essential in ensuring tangible and practical methodologies of assuring high quality education provision in this sector in order to build and sustain both trust and attractiveness. On the other hand, a common credit system which allows learning to be grouped into units and understood in terms of its value is also seen as a necessary step. The ECVET system supports mobility, credit transfer and most of all serves as a tool that attempts to measure workload and skills developed.

VET has thus featured as a central theme in education policy in Malta in the past 15 years. Based on the importance VET has been given in the past years, the achievements and developments which Malta has registered in the sector, and the weight VET policy has gained on a European policy, this document seeks to collate a brief review of the VET sector in Malta. Furthermore it provides a strategic opportunity to give an outlook on possible goals for the furthering and widening VET in Malta. Policy recommendations are two-pronged: addressing quality and attractiveness as well as ensuring labour market relevance. These notions are in themselves interlinked in providing and sustaining stronger vocational education in Malta.

This document is the outcome of an exercise which brings together all VET policy direction documentation tied with an overview of the current scenario of the VET sector in Malta. This was then presented for discussion to an expert group composed of the key stakeholders involving VET providers and industry for feedback in particular in terms of identifying niche areas that need to be addressed and recommendations for a way forward for VET. This included the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLLL), the Malta Council for Economic and Social Dialogue (MCESD), and representatives from the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE). This document was then presented for discussion with a broader audience for feedback in July 2014 through targeted stakeholder meetings and a consultative conference bringing together the various parties concerned.

ESTABLISHING THE VET CONTEXT IN MALTA

An Overview – adapted from ReferNET – CEDEFOP, VET in Europe Country Report, Malta (2013)

Historical Background

Technical education in Malta dates back to the 14th century. It revolved mainly around training in skills and craft work related to the building trade, furniture making and silver work amongst others. After World War II, provision of technical education was strengthened. The 1952 Industrial Training Act placed a new responsibility on employers to invest in the training of their workers and regulated apprenticeships. The 1950s and 1960s led to the opening of a number of technical schools and the building of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) was approved. It offered courses in the areas of Hotel Administration, Commerce and Business Studies, and Civil, Mechanical and Electrical engineering. The number of students following technical education increased steadily. The College was however closed down and transformed into a 'New' University in 1977.

Restructuring of the compulsory educational system in the 70s involved trade schools being set up with 75% of the time allocated to vocational skills for students of ages 14-16 and technical institutes were consolidated. This was reversed in the 1990s and early 2000 in terms of secondary schooling and a heavy investment was set post-2000 on post-secondary level vocational education and training particularly due to the setting up of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). MCAST served to bring together a number of institutes. Vocational education had not been receiving the same level of investment as general and academic higher education during the 1980s and 1990s and therefore this 2001 milestone led to a new era of vocational education and training in Malta, building on the success of other high quality public VET provision which had already been in place such as in the tourism sector through the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS).

Present Education System

Compulsory education starts at the age of 5, even though most of the children attend kindergarten between the ages of 3 and 5. The new National Curriculum Framework puts schooling from the ages of 3 to 7 into early years, followed by another 4 years of primary education. Following these two cycles, students move on to secondary education where they spend another 5 years up to the age of 16 which is the end of compulsory education.

The inclusion of vocational subjects starts from upper secondary level. The current secondary education system is one where the students have subject specialisation from the third year of studies at the age of 14. In 2011 a National 3-year Vocational Pilot Project was launched offering Vocational qualifications in 4 Vocational subjects in a number of state and non-state schools. Now the government has provided the option of vocational home-grown subjects as optional subjects and are being validated and certificated at par with other SEC subjects. The move was made as one measure to reduce the number of school dropouts.³ Vocational subjects have found their way back into compulsory education within standard secondary schools (rather than in specialised vocational schools).

³ Office of Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Employment (2013) *An Early School-Leaving Strategy for Malta*: Salesian Press

At post-compulsory level (MQF Levels 1 to 6) students have a number of possible options. They can seek employment, continue with their studies, or else remain inactive. Employment options for low-qualified young persons is still possible but is on the decrease. In terms of VET provision, the main state institutions which provide VET are the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). MCAST provides courses from MQF level 1 to MQF level 6 while ITS provide training up to MQF level 5, which may lead to a continuation of a degree at MQF level 6 at the University of Malta.

Early School Leavers

The role of VET in Malta can be assessed within the whole of the post-compulsory education system in the country. In recent years, there has been a significant investment in VET both to provide the labour market with more and a better skilled workforce, but also to work towards European targets related the Europe 2020 strategies.

After discussions with EUROSTAT, the National Statistics Office has come to define ESL in Malta as those persons between 18 and 24 years of age who do not have at least the equivalent of Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) passes (grades 1 to 7) in five different subjects and who are not in education or training.⁴ Although much has been achieved in the last decade, Malta still lags behind the EU27 average and is still over 10% away from the Europe 2020 target of having less than 10% of early school leavers by the year 2020.

The period covering 2009 to 2013 shows a 6.2% decrease in four years, with a 27.1% rate in 2009 having been reduced to 20.9% in 2013. However, Malta's rate of ESL in 2013 was still the second highest in the EU and well above the EU average of 11.9%.⁵

Students in Further and Higher Education

The table below shows the demographics for young people at post-compulsory age (beyond the age of 16). It can be noted that the number of students at post-secondary level have increased consistently three years in a row. Post-secondary academic education is typically two years long and leads to entry to tertiary education. There was also an increase in the number of students in tertiary education. The number of students in vocational education appears to have decreased, however as shown in the table the decrease is proportionate to the increase in higher education which may have resulted through the further inclusion of VET participation at higher levels. In addition, when one looks at the gender distribution, it can be noted that while there are more females in post-secondary education and tertiary education, there are more males in vocational education.

TABLE 1:
Population of Students in Post-secondary, Vocational and Tertiary Education⁶

Academic Year	Further Level (Academic)			Further Level (Vocational)			Higher Level		
	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total	Females	Males	Total
2008/2009	3,655	2,802	6,457	2,640	4,021	6,661	5,701	4,476	10,177
2009/2010	3,575	2,956	6,531	3,069	4,704	7,773	6,080	4,657	10,737
2010/2011	3,723	3,011	6,734	4,052	5,269	9,321	6,664	5,050	11,714
2011/2012	3,650	2,959	6,609	2,771	3,683	6,454	8,023	6,695	14,718 ⁷

⁴ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014) A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta

⁵ Ministry for Education and Employment (2014) A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta

⁶ National Commission for Further and Higher Education (2014) Further and Higher Education Statistics 2012

⁷ Under Higher Level, the table above represents students at Higher Education levels irrespective of whether they were in academic or vocational education. With regard to 2011/2012 – 845 of the female students at higher level were studying at a VET-oriented institution and 1,168 of the male students at higher level were studying at a VET-oriented institution. Therefore at total of 2,013 students of the 14,718 were following higher level education at VET-oriented institution. Also, statistics in this table include students attending the main state VET providers in Malta.

Demographic Change

Life expectancy was 78.0 for males and 82.2 for females in 2012. Population projections indicate a continuously ageing population where Malta's population is expected to reach 429,000 persons by 2025 and to just over 350,000 by 2060⁸. Life expectancy is also projected to increase in the period 2010-2060 with life expectancy at birth to increase from 77.6 to 84.9 years for males and 82.3 to 88.9 years for women⁹.

This demographic change is bringing new challenges to Malta where the country needs to invest in vocational education and training to ensure a supply of a skilled workforce not only in the area of elderly care, but most importantly also to ensure that workers can remain productive in the labour market as the retirement age has gradually been increased from the age of 60 to 65 years.

Sectoral Employment

With a population of 421,364¹⁰ in a population density of 1,333 per square kilometre of which 287,767 are of ages 15-65, the number of persons registered as employed in Malta as at March 2014 stands at 175,630¹¹ (61% of total working age population) out of which 109,119 (62.1% of those registered employed) were male and 66,511 (37.9% of those registered employed) were female¹². There is a great disparity in the number of men to women in the labour market, even if the ratio decreased in the past years.

The table below provides the distribution of employment across the different NACE sectors in 2013-2014. It shows how employment is highest in 'Wholesale and Retail, Transportation and Storage, Accommodation and Food Service Activities' and followed by 'Public Administration, Defence, Education, Human Health and Social Work Activities'. It is also to be noted that the two sectors where there is a gender balance (despite the much larger number of men in the labour market) were the 'Finance and Insurance Services' as well as the 'Public Administration, Defence, Education, Human Health and Social Work Activities'. In fact, in both of these sectors, the number of women is higher than the number of men and in the former sector the number of women grew between 2013 and 2014. 'Construction' and 'Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing' are largely dominated by males even though the data provided below does not provide actual figures for females due to unreliability of the sample observations.

⁸ National Statistics Office (2013) *Malta in Figures 2013*, Valletta: NSO

⁹ National Statistics Office (2011) *Demographic Review 2010*, Malta: NSO

¹⁰ EUROSTAT [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=demo_pjanbroad&lang=en] Accessed on 01/06/2014

¹¹ EUROSTAT [<http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>] Accessed on 01/06/2014

¹² National Statistics Office (2014) *Labour Force Survey Q1/2014*

TABLE 2:
No. of employed persons across the different NACE sectors in 2011-2014¹³

NACE sector	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Agriculture, forestry and fishing	1,802	N/A	1,527	N/A	1,553	N/A	2,009	N/A
Manufacturing, mining and quarrying and other industry	22,865	6,813	21,343	6,039	19,566	6,617	20,861	6,529
Construction	11,193	616	10,298	470	10,524	N/A	12,097	N/A
Wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities	33,325	14,264	33,668	15,877	33,758	15,441	31,840	17,532
Information and communication	4,833	1,596	5,611	2,017	5,409	2,250	4,496	1,728
Financial and insurance activities	3,144	3,533	3,481	4,192	3,821	4,942	3,548	4,704
Real estate activities	555	N/A	576	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities	7,197	4,264	7,053	4,707	7,037	4,256	7,387	6,415
Public administration, defence, education, human health and social work activities	21,686	23,160	22,028	25,168	21,122	25,628	20,652	24,562
Other services	3,694	3,728	4,242	3,954	4,589	3,883	5,527	3,698
TOTAL¹⁴	110,294	58,417	109,827	62,874	107,898	64,411	109,119	66,511

The employment patterns in the different sectors provide a snapshot of needs in vocational education and training in Malta. However, Malta's labour market, due to its size can vary easily and labour market needs can fluctuate depending on the economic circumstances. An overview of the NACE sectors and their relevant developments over time can give an outlook as to which sectors need specific targeted training or promotion amongst the younger generation respectively.

¹³ National Statistics Office (2014) Labour Force Survey Q1/2014

¹⁴ Total does not necessarily tally with the addition of the respective column due to N/A figures not being displayed. N/A figures are not displayed since data sample either under-represented or unreliable. [Verified with NSO]

TABLE 3
Distribution of employment per status across gender in 2011-2014¹⁵

Occupation	2011		2012		2013		2014	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Armed Forces	1,774	N/A	2,010	N/A	1,453	N/A	1,624	N/A
Legislators, senior officials and managers	11,082	3,389	11,747	4,328	12,396	4,225	12,053	4,335
Professionals	13,398	1,2310	14,205	13,655	13,621	14,537	14,477	13,761
Technicians and Associated Professionals	16,845	6,908	16,797	7,753	16,844	7,869	15,515	9,400
Clerks	7889	11,473	8,104	11,697	7,397	13,060	7,464	11,604
Service Workers and shop and market sales workers	16822	16,067	17,065	17,073	17,200	16,338	16,446	18,494
Skilled agriculture and fishery workers	1,838	N/A	1,519	N/A	1,547	N/A	1,979	N/A
Craft and related trade workers	18,719	936	17,725	814	18,120	N/A	18,968	N/A
Plant and Machine operators assemblers	9,415	3,042	8,941	2,428	8,149	2,590	9,564	3,015
Elementary Occupations	12,512	4,099	11,714	4,813	11,171	4,702	11,029	4,957
TOTAL¹⁶	110,294	58,417	109,827	62,874	107,898	64,411	109,119	66,511

It can be noted that the sectors where there is major employment include mainly 'Service Workers and Shop and Market Sales Workers'. They are then followed by 'Professionals' and 'Technicians and Associated Professionals'. When one looks at gender distribution, the best balance between genders is identified with respect to professionals and service and sales workers which are the largest sectors of employment. On the other hand, there is a great gender disparity in the case of legislators and managers. This reflects the persistent problem of the females being under-represented in decision-making positions.

Anticipation of Labour Needs

One of the main characteristics of Malta's economy is its rapid changing labour market. One sectoral investment may be substantial enough to create a new labour market need and provide substantial shifts in the demand for skills. Due to the large impact even one investment can make it even more challenging to predict future skills needs for Malta.

There exist some national instruments which are used to acquire data about skills needs and labour forecasting at national level, even if this may not always be the main aim for these tools. These instruments include the labour market statistics produced by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in Malta. NSO produces data derived from scientific surveys based on international methodologies and criteria, such as the Labour Force Surveys. It also publishes employment-related administrative data collected by ETC, such as the regular updates on the gainfully occupied population and registered unemployed¹⁷. Although these instruments do not forecast future skills needs, they give a snapshot of the current situation of economic activity and respective trends.

¹⁵ National Statistics Office (2014) Labour Force Survey Q1/2014

¹⁶ Total does not necessarily tally with the addition of the respective column due to N/A figures not being displayed. N/A figures are not displayed since data sample either under-represented or unreliable. [Verified with NSO]

¹⁷ Debono M. (2008) Improving the capacity to anticipate EU-wide labour market and skills requirements: Malta, Contribution to the EEO Review: Autumn 2008

The Central Bank of Malta also carries out quarterly surveys among employers within the various economic sectors, forecasting their short-term employment needs. Similarly, the Malta Chamber of Commerce Enterprise and Industry compiles a monthly 'Industry trends survey', based on a selected sample of local operators in the manufacturing industry. Another study which provides some insights into the labour market is the annual Malta attractiveness survey¹⁸ which collects data from foreign-owned companies in Malta. Trade unions also tend to invest in reviewing employment strategies and policies.¹⁹

Specific forecasting of labour needs in particular sectors is often based on one-off, ad-hoc studies, sometimes forming part of new policy and strategy documents about a specific sector. Examples of studies carried out on skills needs include the ICT²⁰ and the environment²¹ sectors.

Malta Qualifications Framework

Malta is also working to ensure that qualifications are given their due value in the labour market. The establishment of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) has enabled all training providers in Malta, also VET providers, to link their qualifications to the MQF. The MQF is based on 8 levels similar to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Being at the forefront of this process, Malta has referenced the MQF to the EQF in 2009.

The MQF captures all levels of education from compulsory to post-doctoral degrees, continuous professional development and adult education and is not only referenced to the EQF but also to the Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF/EHEA). It is founded on three pillars which are: Qualification Levels; Qualification Types; and Quality Assurance Criteria.

One of the central shifts in Malta's education system brought about through the establishment of the qualifications framework is the shift towards a learning-outcomes based approach. Learning Outcomes are statements that describe what a qualification represents in terms of the application and its components, namely knowledge, skills and competences. Learning outcomes prepare individuals for both employment and for further education and training.²² The MQF supports progression, transferability and permeability across education pathways whilst instilling an approach in favour of developing key competences especially in its lower levels. The MQF has adopted a standard of 1 credit which equals to 25 hours of total learning. The Learning Outcomes are divided in knowledge, skills and competences which are in turn explained through: Knowledge and Understanding; Applying Knowledge and Understanding; Communication Skills; Judgemental Skills; Learning Skills; and Autonomy and Responsibility.

The changing population demographics, the economy and the regulation of provision of education and training provide an interesting backdrop within which VET can play a key role in Malta's economy, and in improving people's quality of life. The third edition of the Referencing Document²³ has also created the opportunity for short courses and awards, a number of which provided by employers as training for their workers to be level-rated and accredited on the MQF. This system does not only facilitate learners' paths in lifelong learning but also helps employers to understand better qualifications and to give employees more value and credit.

¹⁸ Ersnt & Young (2013) *The Economy: Today and Tomorrow Malta's Attractiveness Survey*

¹⁹ UHM (2012) *JOBS+ The Next Step: Active Labour Market Policy*

²⁰ Ministry for Investment, Industry and IT (2007) *Scoping Study on the demand and supply of ICT Skills in Malta, Report compiled by KPMG in collaboration with the Ministry for Investment, Industry and IT*

²¹ ETC (2007) *Employment in the Environment Goods and Services Industry in Malta*

²² NCFHE (2012) *Referencing of the MQF to the EQF and the QF/EHEA 3rd Ed.*

²³ *Ibid.*

Quality Assurance of VET Qualifications

The current scenario in the Further and Higher Education sector involves a major leap forward focusing on developing a national framework for quality assurance for lifelong learning which covers VET, Tertiary education as well as adult education. The year 2012 has seen the same promulgation of the Legal Notice 295/2012²⁴ which tackles quality assurance and sets the duties of the National Commission for Higher and Further Education. One of the major roles assigned to NCFHE is the regulation and licensing of training institutions. For the purposes of its accreditation and external quality assurance functions, the legal notice states that the Commission should be sufficiently independent from government, from providers as well as from business, industry and professional associations in all their operations and decisions. Part of NCFHE's remit involves licensing, accreditation and quality assurance functions.

All providers providing further or higher education in or from Malta will require a licence issued by the Commission to operate in Malta. A licence to provide further or higher education under these regulations shall only be issued, renewed, changed or extended if the provider complies with the provisions of a number of specific regulations.

The Quality Assurance Committee, which has already been set up, has the power to set Quality Assurance standards and to regulate the licences. The processes and procedures which are to be adopted are described in detail in the Legal Notice 296/2012.

Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning

The National Reform Programme (NRP) update²⁵ reports initiatives taken by government to include, among other aspects: developing a policy on the validation of informal and non-formal learning and the setting up of Sector Skills Units; and the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) to start conducting validation of prior learning and work experience.

In 2012, Legal Notice 295/2012²⁶ set the regulations for the validation of informal and non-formal learning. The object of these regulations is to provide a regulatory scope and framework for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. It is also to regulate the granting of validation awards classified within the Malta Qualifications Framework. The Commission has the power to establish a Sector Skills Committee to govern and regulate the validation process. Sector Skills Units are also to be set up with their main initial focus to be that of establishing occupational standards and the respective validation process in the given sector. The legal notice provides details on the process of validation and how it is to be regulated.

Participation in Adult Education

The table below gives statistical data on the percentage participation in lifelong learning. Lifelong learning, in the EUROSTAT data, refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey. In both the average for the EU27 Member States as well as in Malta, the percentage of population involved in adult education has increased gradually. Over a period of 10 years, Malta has remained below the EU27 average catching up by 0.6% from 2.6% difference to 2.0%. However, there is a national discussion about the national figures as the total number of learners which the Directorate for Lifelong Learning alone caters for on its own in evening classes is more than the percentage quoted for Malta.

²⁴ <http://www.ncfhe.org.mt/uploads/filebrowser/qa&licensingLN.pdf> [Accessed on 15/06/2014]

²⁵ Ministry of Finance (2013) Malta's National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy: April 2013

²⁶ <http://www.ncfhe.org.mt/uploads/filebrowser/validationLN.pdf> [Accessed on 15/06/2014]

TABLE 4
Percentage of population involved in Lifelong learning for people ages 25-64²⁷

Country	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU avg.	7.2	8.5	9.2	9.6	9.5	9.3	9.4	9.3	9.1	8.9	9.0	10.5
Malta	4.6	4.4	4.2	4.3	5.3	5.5	6.0	6.1	6.2	6.5	7.0	7.5

It is also to be noted that whilst the trend across Europe reflected an overall decrease in participation between 2005 and 2012 despite a spring upwards in 2013, to the contrary, Malta continued to show a steady gradual increase in participation in lifelong learning.

VET and CVET

The State VET institutions, MCAST and ITS, provide training for free and are regulated by the Education Act. The Education Act specifies the scope and organisational structure of these VET providers. It also gives these two entities the legal power to issue qualifications. MCAST and ITS provide mainly IVET courses while certain private providers do also provide IVET courses mainly in ICT, Beauty and Performing Arts.

There is also provision of VET for adults in Malta as part of CVET. This is mainly through part-time evening courses such as those offered by MCAST for workers who wish to up-skill themselves. ETC also provides adult learning and whilst it mainly caters for unemployed people, persons wishing to upskill themselves also attend. ITS also offers evening courses. These courses offer opportunities to adults, already in the labour market, to invest in lifelong learning and follow courses to obtain qualifications enabling them to improve their employment opportunities and career advancement.

Another provider of adult VET education is the DLLL which offers a good number of evening courses, among them also a number of courses in VET that range from Arts and Crafts courses to various ICT courses. These courses are supported by government and fees are very low.

In recent years we have seen an increasing number of private institutions which offer CVET being set up. These private institutions offer vocational training in various sectors, with ICT being one of the more popular training areas being offered. Many of these institutions offer courses which lead to qualifications issued by foreign accreditation bodies.

Accredited courses offered by these institutions are level-rated on the Qualifications Framework by the NCFHE; whilst in the case of foreign courses, these are verified through the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (QRIC). Seeking accreditation and recognition processes have increased steadily over the years, with more educational institutions and employers making such requests due to entry or employment purposes, respectively.

Guidance and Counselling

Career Guidance in State Schools is offered by College Career Advisors, School Counsellors, Guidance Teachers and Trainee Career Advisors by assisting learners in managing life situations more effectively and acquiring the necessary key competences so as to attain their curricular performance goals while developing holistically as a person.

²⁷ EUROSTAT [<http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tsdsc440&plugin=1>] Accessed on 05/06/2014

The service covers curricular, vocational and career guidance with students and parents. Transition programmes from school to place of work are also offered while Form 4 and 5 students are taken on orientation visits to different places of work and vocational Colleges. Form 4 students spend some time in selected industries as part of Job Exposure Initiatives.

The career officers work in close collaboration with VET Institutions as regards opportunities for study and employment in the different vocational sectors. The students participate in vocational institutions promotion activities such as the Choice programme by ITS and the EXPO by MCAST.

The Guidance section conducts the Tracer Study for all Form 5 students of all state, church and independent schools to find out the development of students after school-leaving age. This study helps to formulate a national picture identifying national, sectoral and school trends.

MCAST, as the main provider of VET, has invested in providing such services to students, which include: Career Guidance; Personal Counselling; and a Learning Support Unit. ETC provides a number of lifelong guidance initiatives to encourage jobseekers to further develop their skills and be assisted in their job search. Job seekers are profiled and allocated a personal employment advisor. Jobseekers are encouraged to follow courses offered by the Corporation to ensure that the latter have the necessary knowledge, skills and competences required by the labour market.

The training of career guidance professionals has so far been supported by the Career Guidance Capacity Building Scholarship scheme and this has also been reflected by the University of Malta developing the Post-Graduate Diploma in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development which is funded under this scheme. In addition, government has over the years issued sponsorships to professionals specialising in the sector at Masters level.

VET PROVISION IN MALTA

MCAST

Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), as Malta's leading VET provider seeks to contribute to growth by providing relevant and modern education and training to all its learners, addressing both the labour market needs and the individual professional growth and development within its curriculum.

The College, a unique institution on the Maltese Islands, is made up of 10 Institutes which embrace the various vocational sectors of the industry context:

- Institute of Agribusiness
- Institute of Applied Sciences
- Institute of Art and Design
- Institute of Building and Construction Engineering
- Institute of Business and Commerce
- Institute of Community Services
- Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineering
- Institute of Information and Communication Technology
- Maritime Institute
- Institute of Mechanical Engineering
- Gozo Campus

MCAST offers 170 IVET full-time and over 300 CVET part-time vocational courses ranging from certificates to degrees (MQF Level 1 to Level 6) covering different industrial sectors. MCAST courses are designed on an outcome based approach to include both Key Competences and Vocational Units. MCAST has adopted the European Qualifications Framework and the system of ECVET for its Level 1 to 4 qualifications and ECTS for Levels 5 and 6 qualifications. These EU tools together with the Europass enhance the permeability and mobility prospective of MCAST's students in their career and study paths.

The full-time student population now stands at 6500 students. During each academic year MCAST also provides short training courses for approximately 4,000 part-time students. MCAST employs more than 500 members of staff. MCAST offers support services to its students and prospective ones through its Information and Support Services Centre which include career guidance, counselling, Inclusive Education Unit and the Pathway to Independent Living Programme.

The table below represents the trend in the student population as from the launching of MCAST in 2001, depicting the success to the work involved in promoting not only attractiveness to VET programmes but more so, to the transparency and trust of MCAST's quality qualifications.

TABLE 5

Academic Year	Student Population	Females	Males
2013 - 2014	6,500	2,650	3,850
2001 - 2002	1,600	1,000	600

MCAST STUDENT POPULATION

Student Tracer Studies, an overview of the different destinations pursued by MCAST graduates following the successful completion of their studies, monitors and helps to identify aspects for curriculum improvement and development.

As a measure of ensuring that MCAST's curriculum is constantly tied to the needs of the labour market and in order to make curriculum development a sustainable process MCAST has set up an organisation structure where Curriculum Development is strongly linked to Staff Professional Development, Research and Innovation, Apprenticeship and Entrepreneurship and which is supported by a strong Quality Management System. This process includes consultation with industry and employers' associations to guarantee relevance of the curriculum to meet the current and future economic needs.

MCAST is currently modernising its curriculum to reflect present and future needs of industry focusing on enhancing employability to students. MCAST Programmes covering all the different sectors from Level 1 to Level 5 as well as the Pathway to Independent Living Programme, are being reviewed and new programmes are also being designed to ensure that the courses which are offered are more relevant to industrial needs and more attractive to students. The curriculum incorporates embedded learning to address the needs of learners following lower level courses.

MCAST is also exploring new possible models of work-based learning including apprenticeship that work flexibly around needs of education and industry in order to provide more placements that may lead to permanent employment. This it does through regular and continuous dialogue and collaboration with industry to identify current and future needs as well as to gain access to latest technology in order to impart the relevant and required training.

To address a need to promote and support a sense of entrepreneurship in youth, MCAST currently offers entrepreneurship courses as an integral part of every Degree Course being offered at MCAST at level 6. It is now working to strengthen its entrepreneurship curriculum by offering entrepreneurship training at all levels within its educational and training courses.

MCAST is widening its portfolio and building solid grounds in Research & Innovation and is developing further internal research capabilities to meet the demands of Government and Industry in the field. As the leading provider of vocational education in Malta, MCAST aims to create a dynamic environment that encourages an active knowledge transfer between students and lecturers and industrial stakeholders. MCAST is currently exploring possible opportunities offered through EU programmes such as Horizon 2020.

Enriched with a successful experience on the implementation of a VET curriculum, MCAST is collaborating with the Directorate of State Secondary Schools on the introduction of VET subjects in the secondary compulsory education.

MCAST gives importance to staff training and professional development which includes a Level 6 teacher training qualification and short courses to its academic and administrative staff. MCAST also helps in financing and sponsoring further studies to its staff and is currently also exploring the possibility of funding training opportunities in industry and foreign Higher Education Institution through Erasmus+.

MCAST also offers a Child Care Facility – MCAST Magic Wonders to its students with children, facilitating their continuation of studies and thus enhancing their chances of employment. MCAST actively participated in projects related to EQAVET and ECVET to promote mobility and implementation of European tools within its vocational education and training system and has benefitted from several European Social Fund projects addressing the skills mismatch between education and the labour market.

Institute of Tourism Studies

Tourism and hospitality can be viewed as almost part and parcel of the culture of the Islands of Malta, an inherent element of Maltese identity.

Students of tourism and hospitality in Malta benefit from this mixture of ingrained hospitality supported by a well developed infrastructure underpinning the wide range of services available to visitors to our islands. Students have a practically unique opportunity to immerse themselves in a rich history, colourful local fabric and linguistic accessibility, as well as an international community. The Islands of Malta provide an exciting destination for tourism related to maritime, archaeological, folkloristic and sporting and leisure elements, to name but a few.

As a key contributor to the Maltese economy, the tourism sector in Malta has gone from strength to strength, constantly striving to innovate and reinforce its product by identifying various niches through which it can present the Maltese experience to visitors. In this respect Tourism Education has become a pillar of the industry. Students can now take advantage of this grounding in cutting-edge tourism knowledge and technologies together with practical exposure to the industry which the Institute of Tourism Studies offers.

There are nearly 800 full-time students and another 300 part-time students in a variety of courses from foundation/certificate level going up to Diploma courses and Higher National Diploma Level courses. Subject areas include Hospitality and Tourism Management, Hotel Operations and Events Management, Culinary Arts, Food & Beverage Service, Tourism Information Systems, Tour Guiding and Sports Tourism. The Institute is also planning the launch of a Level 6 degree programme in the coming academic year.

As an important partner to the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, ITS places a lot of importance on the fostering of a Quality Culture in its operations. The ITS Quality Assurance System places the onus of its implementation upon the entire Institute and is mainly based on self-reviews operating in all institutional areas at different levels on a continuous cyclic basis, focused on continuous self-improvement and accountability to stakeholders. The major aim of ITS' AQA System is to improve quality in all aspects of the Institute's operations whenever and wherever possible with the ultimate objective of guaranteeing the quality of students' holistic learning experience both academically and in areas of social and personal development.

Employment and Training Corporation

The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) is Malta's public employment agency and a licensed Further and Higher Education Institute. ETC offers a variety of training programmes that range from short courses to traineeships. The range of short courses delivered by the Corporation, which are also offered to employed and inactive persons, varies from basic competences in literacy and soft skills, to more trade and technical courses. ETC currently offers 6 courses at MQF level 1, 22 courses at MQF level 2, 16 courses at MQF level 3 and 6 courses at MQF level 4. The training courses are generally delivered at ETC's modern Training Complex, which has more than 40 classrooms and workshops, all equipped with the latest technology. Furthermore, a number of workshops and activities, including seminars and information sessions are organised in order to better skill the job seekers in these areas, and bridge the skills gap. Workshops are targeted according to the specific needs of the client group.

To enhance the quality of its training services, the Corporation set up a Unit that specifically develops and updates training programmes, as well as provide and implement a Quality Assurance framework for training programme delivery. The Unit has adopted and implemented quality standards that range from the qualifications required by trainers delivering training programmes, to classroom facilities, learner's course notes, assessment and certification.

ETC collaborates with a number of stakeholders and promotes the exchange of information from its various partners to its different jobseekers or potential jobseekers, to ensure that different client groups are provided with the information needed to integrate in the labour market. Indeed at the design stage of training programmes, ETC involves representatives from the industry to ensure that its courses meet the demands of the labour market. From time to time, ETC also offers a number of exposure schemes that aim to provide clients with practical work experience.

Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers

The Adult Learning Unit within the Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLLL) has the mission to increase participation in adult learning and to address the imbalances in participation to achieve a more equitable state of affairs. It is responsible for the selection, recruitment and placement of adult educators within its different sectors, namely the 7 Evening Classes Centres, the Lifelong Learning Centre in Msida (LLC) and courses offered at community level.

By the end of 2013, the DLLL engaged around 279 adult educators on a part-time basis. The Directorate continued to train and recruit adult educators who are specialised in various fields. Throughout the learning year 2013/2014, the DLLL received 13,001 applications for adult learning courses. Of these applicants 67% are female and 33% are male.

Over the past years, the courses offered by the Unit have continued to attract more learners. In 2013/14 there was an overall increase of 57% when compared to 2008/2009 when 8,225 students were enrolled.

As one of the leading providers of Adult Learning in Malta and Gozo, the Adult Learning Unit, is offering a number of courses at 7 different Evening Classes Centres and at the Lifelong Learning Centre in Msida. In 2013, for the first time the use of the Msida Centre was also extended to evening classes.

There are 14 different languages, 8 subjects in the Mathematical, Science and Technological competence, 19 ICT-related subjects, and 7 subjects related to entrepreneurship, 25 subjects in social

(including health) and civic competence, and 48 vocational subjects. In total, the Adult learning Unit offers 277 subjects available for lifelong learners in Malta and Gozo.

These courses vary in levels, type and depth and in the comprehensive number of learners attending amounting to 712 classes. VET courses are accredited at VET level 1 while those at level 2 are in the process of being accredited.

Evening Classes are also referred to as second chance opportunities for adult learners. For the 2013-2014 courses, the number of adult learners who registered for the Evening Classes courses was 9,887. During 2013, the DLLL and the Department for Local Government (DLG) continued to collaborate together on the scheme called 'Lifelong Learning in the Community' which was first launched in 2010. Besides the Adult Literacy (Maltese & English) and Numeracy (Maths) courses hosted by local councils, the DLLL offered other courses amongst which: Lace Making, Ganutell, Spanish, Italian, French, German as well as English and Maltese as a Foreign Language. Twenty two (22) local councils entered this scheme and offered one or more subjects mentioned above to their respective residents. Besides courses offered at the Local Councils, the DLLL offers lifelong learning courses to a number of organisations, Enterprises and NGOs. The total number of participants reached 2,153, an increase of 96% when compared to the previous year. 107 adult educators are rendering their services in the community, of which 80 are directly involved with local councils. The DLLL has also been entrusted to implement the EU Agenda for Adult Learning in Malta.

Youth.inc

Youth.inc is an inclusive education programme, based on applied learning, for young people between the age of 16 and 21. The aim of the programme is to help young people to improve their standard of education and gain more knowledge, values and skills to enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue in further education and/or training. Youth.inc is under the remit and management of Aġenzija Żgħażaġh, which adopts a more youth-centred approach and seeks to strengthen the complementary role of formal and non-formal learning.

Youth.inc has two different levels of entry in accordance with the Malta Qualifications Framework. The programme is based on assisting the young person to gain key competences, sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge at the different levels. Included in the learning are skills that are transferable to the next stage of education and training namely:

- Applying theory to work-related challenges
- Acquiring knowledge
- Gaining basic skills
- Embracing values
- Working in a team

Youth.inc is currently being offered as a full-time Level 1 and Level 2 programme at the complex of Aġenzija Żgħażaġh in Santa Venera. The entry requirement for Level 1 or Level 2 is completion of full time compulsory education. The entry age is 16 years and young people who register for the programme are required to sit for an assessment which determines their participation in either Level 1 or Level 2 depending on their competences and skills. Young people entering Level 1 will progress to Level 2 upon successful completion of Level 1.

Private Providers

The private providers licensed in Malta by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education tend to mostly provide courses of an academic nature. ICT, Business and Commerce and courses in Human Resources tend to be the most popular among local students – largely due to the abundance of career options available in these particular sectors, locally and abroad. The popularity of degrees awarded by a foreign body is evident in the profusion of locally registered institutions that offer such programmes of studies to Maltese students.

Provision of accredited courses with a UK awarding body recognized from Levels 1 to Level 8 on the European Qualifications Framework continues to increase by local registered providers. However, many institutions are opting to accredit a course themselves. Locally accredited courses range from vocational education programmes in welding, electronics, jewelry design and crafts to courses in performing arts and sports to more traditionally academic programmes in languages, finance and arts. Although the majority of locally accredited programmes tend to mostly be awards (short courses of not longer than 100 hours), local institutions are opting to also accredit certificates, diplomas, Bachelor's and Masters' Degrees.

Foreign providers are also approaching NCFHE to open up a campus locally. These institutions tend to mostly be foreign universities and opt to offer programmes that are already accredited as well as accredit degrees and programme of studies locally.

Mapping of the Bruges Communiqué to gauge Malta's achievements

1. Making IVET an attractive learning option

- Public VET providers are doing their utmost to promote VET and give the best service possible through the great variety of courses offered. Training of staff, both teaching and administrative is given top priority.
- Inclusion of VET subjects in secondary compulsory education. Guidance and career service is offered to all compulsory education students.
- All the 8 key competences are included in all VET programmes from Levels 1-3.
- All VET courses are practice-oriented and in most cases students have work-based placements in industry.
- Guidance officers and ETC conduct Tracer Studies and other monitoring on work placements.

2. Fostering the excellence, quality and relevance of both IVET and CVET

- Legal Notice 296/2012 sets the duties of NCHFE in terms of Quality Assurance of all educational institutions including VET providers. Part of NCHFE's remit involves licensing, accreditation and quality assurance functions of all programmes undertaken at all levels.
- A Quality Assurance framework is being set in accordance with EQAVET recommendations and criteria to ensure a common QA framework for all VET providers within a national framework for quality assurance comprising all forms of education.
- Public VET providers organise teacher training programmes in-house or in conjunction with the University of Malta.
- Public VET providers provide CPD and liaison with industry for re-training in modern techniques.
- VET institutions make use of EU exchange and placement programmes for staff development.
- Improving established contacts with industry in order to improve teachers skills and knowledge.
- There is a continuous and healthy involvement of industry and social partners with the public VET institutions. Social partners and industry participate in national initiatives for promoting and discussing VET-related issues such as NQF and VINFL.
- All VET curricula are being set as outcome-oriented and more responsive to industry.
- Nearly all public VET provision is based on home grown courses to reflect national needs.
- Feedback from guidance services through tracer studies.
- Work-based learning is carried out in a number of courses.
- A good number of courses are run in conjunction with apprenticeship schemes.

3. Enabling flexible access to training and qualifications

- In terms of the lifelong learning target of 15% of adult participation rate – VET providers offer a vast range of accredited evening courses.
- ETC offers re-training programmes for the unemployed, inactive and employed.
- A number of industries offer in-house training which is accredited to NQF.
- A number of industries up-grade their workforce in basic skills training.
- Legal Notice 295/2012 set the regulations for VINFL (Validation of Informal and non-formal learning).
- ETC is the agency entrusted with the validation process of the first sectors being tackled.
- Sector Skills Committee and Units are in the process of being set up. Their primary work is to devise occupational standards in the sector reflecting industry needs and tying these to the MQF.
- ETC is targeting low-skilled and workers at risk for up-skilling and retraining.
- Guidance services to both adults and youth are offered at Educational Institutions. ETC offers guidance to adults.
- VET level 5 and 6 are now being offered in VET institutions.
- Malta established its NQF and was referenced to EQF in 2009. This has served as reform tool towards the shift to a learning-outcomes based approach, increase in quality assurance mechanisms, permeability, recognition and mobility. Accreditation in terms to MQF levels has developed into an essential tool for quality VET provision.
- ECVET is being used in VET institutions. The NCFHE partnered with the main VET institutions to develop a national ECVET conversion methodology which has been piloted through an EU funded project and is now being used for the design of new courses or conversion into ECVET.
- ECTS are used for VET from Level 5 upwards. This was decided so as to have one credit system for Higher Education.

4. Developing a strategic approach to the internalisation of IVET and CVET and promoting international mobility.

- VET providers established links and partnerships with foreign counterparts. Mobility is promoted even through VET programmes, particularly in the tourism sector.
- VET providers have made use of substantial EU funds especially ESF and ERDF.
- VET providers have made use of mobility programmes for students and staff.
- Malta actively participated in projects related to EQF, ECVET, EQAVET and EUROPASS to promote mobility and implement European tools within the education system.

5. Fostering innovation, creativity and entrepreneurship, as well as the use of ICT (in both IVET and CVET)

- Latest technologies and ICT are being used in teaching of VET programmes.
- All VET providers have invested highly in ICT and are working on e-learning.
- Entrepreneurship is being promoted included in various areas through key competence development at lower levels and specified or embedded learning at higher levels.
- A stronger emphasis on practical experiences in enterprise is providing a window of opportunity for the development of entrepreneurial skills and innovation.

6. Realising inclusive IVET and CVET

- VET courses are helping people to manage their careers and play an active role in society.
- VET courses for adults emphasize the overall development of their key competences.
- VET subjects have been introduced in compulsory education as a means of motivation to students to progress with their studies, thus help in reducing the early school-leavers rate which is higher than the 10% mark established by EU.
- VET education is open to students with special needs. A Pathway course to Independent Living is being offered by the main public VET provider. An ACCESS Policy is to be devised for national accessibility arrangements for the VET sector.
- Embedded learning is utilised to deliver key competences to “Foundation courses students at MQF level 1 and 2.

7. Greater involvement of VET stakeholders and greater visibility for the achievements of European cooperation in VET

- A great emphasis has been given on the development of the MQF and its referencing to the EQF. The referencing process has served as an ongoing tool of progress across different sectors in terms of instilling European cooperation even at a national level.
- Significant steps in terms of the 2nd EQF milestone are proving as enabling factors that bring together various stakeholders.
- Extensive participation and promotion of deliverables through projects and initiatives of European tools, such as ECVET, EQAVET and EQF NCP projects.
- Basing policy and legislation on the developments and benefits emanating from European developments such as in the sectors of quality assurance and validation of informal and non-formal learning.
- Frequent dialogue and consultation with all relevant stakeholders to engage them in ownership of European tools

8. Coordinate governance of European and national instruments in the areas of transparency, recognition, quality assurance and mobility

- Various European tools transposed into national policy are coordinated mainly by the NCFHE as well as other public entities or agencies such as the EUPA.
- The referencing process of the MQF to the EQF has brought various European tools to be utilised in a comprehensive manner to achieve education reform and developments in Malta.

9. Intensifying cooperation between VET policy and other relevant policy areas

- There are various areas of cooperation between academic higher education and VET providers to develop, for instance, permeable links between both streams.
- VET initiatives are drawn up with close cooperation and consultation with various influential stakeholders such as trade unions, industry and employers.
- Recognition of competences and qualifications is continuously being sought through MQRIC and private institutions are asking for licensing and accreditation to NQF.

10. Improving the quality and comparability of data for EU policymaking in VET

- Through the use of the Labour Force Survey, the National Statistics Office provides statistical information on the key performance indicators on education as identified by the EU 2020 strategy.
- NCFHE carries an annual national headcount study targeting both public and private institutions which capture data on student participation and course provision.
- Continuous improvement of statistical data provision is sought through EU-wide definitions and prerequisites (EUROSTAT).
- An increase of project-based initiatives which shed light on new area of comparability such as through the EUROSTUDENT survey and other national studies.

11. Making good use of EU support

- ESF Funds and Erasmus+ are being used pro-actively by VET providers.
- There is close cooperation between VET stakeholders in participating in and developing joint projects.
- European policy tools and expertise are utilised within the national context of development and implementation of policy and measures.

IDENTIFYING THE WAY FORWARD

1. National VET Steering Group (NVET)

- a. Setting up of a national VET steering group which brings together all main public VET institutions, the social partners including trade unions and employers, representatives of the VET private sector, representatives of industry, inter-ministerial representatives and a representation from the National Sector Skills Committee.
- b. The NVET Steering Group shall coordinate the implementation and subsequent updates of national VET policy. It shall also coordinate communication between all represented stakeholders in terms of sectoral developments.
- c. The NVET Steering Group shall steer the anticipation of labour market and industry needs and advise policy-makers and VET providers on the responses.
- d. The NVET Steering Group shall develop and implement a national plan towards recognition of all the skills and competences of the entire labour force by 2024.

2. VET Response to Labour Market

- a. VET providers need to work closely with the NVET Steering Group to create proactive responses to planned and unplanned industry needs.
- b. The private sector should be more involved in course design and possible use of private sector resources in course should be explored.
- c. VET providers to work hand in hand with Malta Enterprise to identify projects or potential investors and develop training responses to respective demands.
- d. VET providers to partner with representatives of small businesses to target SME training needs.
- e. VET is to be used for retraining and up-skilling of workers in shrinking NACE sectors that show trends of reduction in employment retention in order to increase the chances for re-employment of such workers.
- f. VET courses are to be developed and promoted among NEETs with particular attention to NACE sectors where the average of employed persons in the sector is ageing and supply of younger workers in the sector is low.
- g. Create a marketing plan for VET in general as well as devise sector/job-specific marketing plans in order to enhance the profiles of career pathways that are currently not attracting enough students to respond to labour market needs.

3. Maximising the Capture and Use of Data

- a. The implementation of a robust national tracer study system which may be utilised for policy direction, informing guidance services and also to follow up student development after completion of studies.
- b. Nation-wide systematic skills gaps analysis on a longitudinal approach.
- c. There is a clear need for data capture and use to be maximised. In line with the ESL policy, existing and emerging avenues for data collection should be consolidated and linked such as suggested through the ESL monitoring system.
- d. Investment in ICT resources for data collection tools to ensure efficiency of capture and timeliness of results.
- e. Conduct a study on the challenges and realities of low-income background students and other vulnerable students in order to ensure that measures are put in place so as not to lose any students from their path up the VET ladder because of their income background or other vulnerability, and not because of their lack of ability/motivation.

4. Increase Under-Graduate (Level 6) and Post-Graduate (Level 7) Programmes and Research in VET Subjects

- a. VET institutions to provide a VET option for Level 6 in all areas of study (as applicable) and initiate concrete plans for the introduction of Level 7 VET programmes.
- b. Coordination of high-level staff and student research projects through allocating human and financial resources, such as establishing centralised units for research and innovation and proactively tapping EU funds, within VET providers.
- c. Introduction of new joint study programmes between public VET providers and academic higher education providers through pilot projects.
- d. Setting up of a new trust fund which attracts incentivised private funding towards research projects at VET institutions. This could bring in platforms for private enterprises to fund and engage high-level research requested by the given industry through the research of students and staff in VET provision.
- e. Promotion of VET amongst female students since these are less inclined to follow such routes.
- f. By mid-2016, conduct an analytical study of the gaps, if these exist, between the requisites for application to a warrant for professions where VET graduates are not allowed access to be warranted.

5. Implementing VET as a Parallel stream to General Education

- a. Follow-up and increase VET-related subjects within compulsory schooling in public, private and independent education provision. The initial phase shall introduce five subjects.
- b. Introduce further vocational qualifications in secondary schooling at the first three levels of the MQF.
- c. Establish VET at school-leaving certification and post-secondary (Higher Education entry) levels to be comparable with general education subjects in collaboration with the MATSEC board in order to provide equal eligibility for progression in all areas of further and higher education.

6. Opening Up and Furthering Support of Private VET Provision

- a. Identify specialised support schemes for business start-ups tied to VET provision in sectors essential for industry.
- b. NCFHE is to partner with Business First, to consult with private VET providers in order to identify their specific needs and provide a comprehensive service for the setting up of new VET providers. Due to the fast-pace at which industry needs evolve, the time necessary for set-ups or new education ventures needs to be minimised in order to ensure effective response which is not hindered by administrative burdens.
- c. Call upon private VET providers to supply provision of courses which respond to developing industry needs in cases where it is more feasible than creating the course through public VET providers.

7. VET Funding Alternatives

- a. Projecting VET in Malta as a centre of excellence and devising a marketing plan for the attraction of foreign fee-paying students in VET in Malta.
- b. Create strategic international partnerships with foreign and international companies to utilise the VET institutions in Malta as tailor-made training centres.
- c. Coordination among EU project funding initiatives between VET providers to identify main areas of cooperation and development.
- d. Following the creation of impetus in high-level VET research in Malta, research initiatives for private industry can be utilised to generate funding.

8. Exposing VET Sector Nationally and Internationally

- a. Exhibitions at individual public VET provider-level as well as a national VET Annual Expo which portrays VET opportunities including public and private providers together with employers.
- b. Participation in VET-related conferences to promote and sustain the quality and visibility of VET in Malta.
- c. Creation of Skills Malta which coordinates national skills competitions to actively participate in EuroSkills and WorldSkills competitions and exhibiting opportunities through various sectors.
- d. Other salient points relevant to this section are listed in section 7 – VET funding alternatives.

9. VET Relationships with Foreign Colleges and Institutes

- a. Support through government scholarship schemes for VET mobility
- b. Actively introduce agreements such as MoUs (as suggested by the ECVET Recommendation) with European and international VET providers for mutual trust and mobility purposes.
- c. Fuller use of all EU-related exchange programmes related to VET.
- d. Partnerships with foreign VET providers to supply entry training into VET courses provided which are unavailable in Malta. Students need to be supported through funding and to be followed up in terms of furthering education or into employment after graduating.
- e. Identify new and developing niche sectors to initiate VET courses through joint course programmes with foreign VET providers.

10. Quality Assurance (QA) in VET

- a. Fulfil the EQAVET requirements as part of the national QA framework for Further and Higher Education. Integrating EQAVET within the national QA framework further instils parity of esteem between VET and academic education since these are governed within one QA framework. External QA is to be based on a reformulation of European Standards and Guidelines principles that are enriched by the EQAVET perspective.
- b. Review of the process of accreditation of programmes and institutions to ensure that the process of accreditation is streamlined within QA.
- c. Development of accreditation and QA processes for e-learning based courses for VET sector.
- d. Ensure VET student participation in Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) and External Quality Assurance (EQA) .
- e. Involve employers in the development and review of all systems concerning programmes and processes.
- f. IQA and EQA to measure beyond participation rates but also retention and completion rates. Due attention is to be given to vulnerable and/or marginalised students.

11. Credit System for VET

- a. Formally establish that ECVET will be used for Levels 1 to 4 VET qualifications whereas ECTS will be used for Levels 5 to 8 for both VET and academic qualifications. This system has already been put in place through MCAST and has proved to ensure and support parity of esteem and facilitate permeability.
- b. The ECVET/ECTS system should be implemented in all accredited VET provision across all sectors and levels in both public and private provision.
- c. Involve industry in the identification of necessary short courses in order to build targeted short courses leading to modular awards.
- d. All VET providers to implement a modular system which gives value to accomplished units by an individual; independent of whether the full course has been achieved. Such units should be transferable for a given period of time. This is to be finalised across Malta by 2017.
- e. Implement the provision of EUROPASS Diploma and Certificate supplements across all public and private VET provision by 2016.

12. Work-Based Learning

- a. Hold a review of relevant legislation and policy challenges such as governance and monitoring.
- b. Hold a review of current apprenticeship and other work-based learning schemes in terms of system and curricula review in terms of labour market needs.
- c. Launch of a new regime of quality-assured apprenticeship scheme through a fully-fledged reform and stakeholder engagement.
- d. Setting up of an assistive service to micro and small businesses to encourage and provide the necessary administrative backup as a way to encourage the hosting of apprentices/interns.
- e. Accredite existing and new work-based learning schemes through a modular approach and through the ECVET system to give added value in terms of credit.
- f. Promote work-based learning schemes heavily with all stakeholders in particular providers, parents, students and industry.
- g. MCAST, as the designated body to drive work-based learning in Malta, is to provide adequate training to those performing, mentoring and monitoring in apprenticeship or work-based learning schemes.

13. Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning (VINFL) and its Relationship with VET Provision

- a. Fully-fledged establishment and functioning of the Sector Skills Committee and Sector Skills Unit.
- b. VET providers and other stakeholders to be actively involved in a structured way in the work of the Sector Skills Unit in the development of Occupational Standards and validation processes which includes the development of national guidelines.
- c. All VET institutions to ensure that learning outcomes of their courses respond to set Occupational Standards once these are set and where applicable.
- d. To ensure the development of modular courses in response to Occupational Standards so as to supply provision of unmet standards for individuals who fail validation assessments.
- e. Initiate recognition of extra-curricular activities and skills developed through such activities at I-VET level, through supplement certification of achievement of such skills.
- f. To ensure that a rigorous QA system for VINFL is set and adhered to in order to build and ensure trust in VINFL concepts and processes. This has to be formulated by the NCFHE hand-in-hand with the Sector Skills Committee.
- g. Develop an accredited training programme for VINFL assessors in evaluating experiences gathered or competences developed by individuals.
- h. Base the VINFL processes and assessment in terms of the ECVET system to give added value in terms of credit.

14. Promoting VET in Terms of Lifelong Learning Opportunities to Reach the EU Target of 15% of Adults Participating in Education and Training by 2020

- a. Enhancing information to providers and the general public on the VET awards system to trigger value to short-course initiatives in different sectors to increase take-up in terms of workers who do not engage in full-time or long-term courses.
- b. Provide financial incentives for adults to participate in lifelong learning VET in targeted sectors.
- c. Provide a support framework, including financial incentives, to employers to invest in CVET training of employees. This should give special attention to low-skilled workers who will benefit from approaches where basic skills are embedded in VET.
- d. Develop CVET courses to respond to workers at risk of unemployment, unemployed persons and other disadvantaged groups.
- e. Partner with employers to provide government support in creating flexible training arrangements (such as in-house training, e-learning and training during working hours) for CVET education.
- f. Promote accreditation of training offered by the industry in order to maximise the potential and recognise the skills achieved.
- g. Promote accreditation of VET courses intended as continuous capacity building.

15. Providing More Comprehensive Career Education

- a. To update and train career education staff with all VET-related information that can be used to guide students into and through the VET stream, including specific training for VINFL guidance to help identify, organise and document individuals' learning experiences.
- b. To hold career education information sessions across secondary and further education providers with the collaboration of Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ and the National Youth Council.
- c. Individual-based career education to unemployed workers and women returning to the labour market in appreciation of their skills and direction towards retraining through VET. This task can be developed hand-in-hand with ETC and Local Councils.
- d. Lifelong career education through the support of ETC in terms of providing targeted guidance to the employed in order to incentivise upskilling and job mobility.
- e. Practical sessions at secondary and post-secondary levels to promote work-orientation experiences and success stories through VET.
- f. Introduce work-place simulation and real experiences to engage students to participate in VET.
- g. Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ, in cooperation with ETC and all education providers, will engage career guidance personnel that would be able to support final year or graduate VET students engage in employment.
- h. Implement Personal Social and Career Development in secondary education curriculum by end.

16. Strengthening an Inclusive VET Sector

- a. Review the successes of the MCAST Pathway Programme for learners with disabilities and learning difficulties with the aim to widen the programme as well as implement the programme in other VET providers.
- b. Establish an ACCESS committee which develops and maintains a policy for inclusivity in terms of VINFL assessment for individuals with disability or learning difficulties.
- c. Engage the ACCESS committee to work hand in hand with VET providers to develop and maintain a policy for inclusivity in VET provision. This policy should develop methods of making VET more inclusive and accessible during tuition and assessment. This should be developed in relation to public VET providers.
- d. A greater emphasis is to be placed on vulnerable and/or marginalised groups and students with disability and/or learning difficulties through QA.
- e. Individual-based support and guidance through VET for vulnerable students and students with learning difficulties or disabilities. This should start from early ages at primary or secondary schooling to identify possibilities of using VET as a progression route for such individuals. Specific training of guidance and career officers is required.

17. Teacher Training and Development

- a. Develop national VET teacher training for a paradigm shift towards student-centered learning, embedded learning, work-based learning, and various modes of assessment.
- b. VET providers are to establish Continuous Professional Development Units to serve as resources to ensure upskilling of trainers in keeping abreast with the latest sectoral developments.
- c. VET providers are to partner with industry to ensure ongoing practical training for professional teachers.
- d. Public VET providers need to assist in supplying training for industry personnel who are responsible for work placements and apprenticeships.
- e. Teacher training should be supported and incentivised.
- f. Provide sectoral-based training for trainers in public VET providers at higher Levels such as MQF Level 7.

18. Modernising Pedagogies, Andragogies and Curricula

- a. Ensure a learning-outcomes based approach in practice across all accredited IVET and CVET.
- b. Regularly monitor content in order to tweak courses according to industry needs.
- c. Promotion of the different pedagogical and andragogical tools and use of ICT.
- d. To promote more blended learning approaches that are flexible to fit around the needs of the individual and different employment exigencies.



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