



Vocational education and training in Malta

Short description





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Foreword

Malta has taken on its first presidency of the Council of the European Union at a time when most EU Member States have started recovering after years of economic hardship, greatly affecting their citizens. The crisis has been a catalyst for change in vocational education and training (VET). With rising high youth unemployment, Member States have sped up VET systems reforms, focusing on expanding apprenticeship and other types of work-based learning to ease labour market transitions. The European Commission and Cedefop have supported the process: monitoring progress towards set priorities, encouraging policy learning from practice, and creating platforms for more effective cooperation between countries, such as the European alliance for apprenticeships. Cedefop has also supported the Commission in preparing the *New skills agenda for Europe* and will assist Member States in its implementation.

Malta was hit less hard by the economic and financial crisis than many other countries. Its employment impact has been limited and economic growth recovered relatively quickly. As in the past, the economy has adapted to new realities and the island State has moved towards a services-based economy faster than elsewhere. The economic landscape is rapidly changing, with emerging sectors such as legal, accounting and financial services, i-gaming and aircraft maintenance becoming new innovation and growth drivers.

But a favourable economic outlook alone does not guarantee growth and prosperity. Skill shortages already felt by employers today could limit growth in the years to come. Low skills attainment and supply bottlenecks are pressing issues. Despite recent encouraging improvements, more than half of the Maltese people is low-skilled. The population is rapidly ageing and older people's low labour market participation is only slowly increasing. On the other side of the age spectrum, too many young people leave education or training early or are inactive at a time where they should be starting a career. Lifelong learning opportunities, to make up for low skills later in life, are available but participation remains too low.

Since 2001, VET reform has been at the heart of Malta's response to economic and social challenges. The country has put in place the foundations to help people develop skills in line with their aspirations and labour market needs and to value skills developed outside of education and training. Important pillars are the comprehensive qualifications framework, expanding opportunities for validation, reforms in compulsory education and apprenticeship and work-based learning and strategies to guide early leaving, active ageing, literacy, VET,

lifelong learning and other policies. Cedefop's past work has helped strengthen the evidence base to encourage reform and inform policy measures: I hope these impacts will continue with our continuing review of skills intelligence and future projects.

Progress is visible and encouraging but more work is needed to ensure that Malta's people have the skills they, and their country, need to grow and prosper. This first short description of VET in Malta aims to contribute to the process, providing a synthetic overview of the system, qualifications, participation, recent and current reforms, achievements and challenges. It describes the VET system using terminology accessible to a wide audience and analyses developments from an EU perspective. I hope this will not only foster understanding among readers not familiar with the Maltese context but also support policy learning between Malta and other countries.

Joachim James Calleja
Director

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Malta



Area:	316 km ²
Capital:	Valetta
System of government:	Parliamentary republic
Population:	434 403 (end 2015)
Per capita gross domestic product (GDP) (nominal):	EUR 21 400 (2015)
Legislative power:	held by a unicameral Parliament (House of Representatives)



CHAPTER 1.

External factors influencing VET

1.1. Demographics

Malta is one of the smallest countries in the world and the smallest in the European Union (EU). It consists of three main islands: Malta, Gozo and Comino, plus a few tiny islets; only the first two islands are inhabited. At the end of 2015, Malta had a population of 434 403 (NSO, 2016b). The country is among the EU Member States with an increasing population, growing by 7.3% in the last decade. The population is spread over 316 km². With a population density of 1 352 people per square kilometre in 2014, Malta is the most densely populated Member State ⁽¹⁾.

⁽¹⁾ Eurostat: *Population density – persons per km²* [[tps00003](#) – 11.8.2016].

At the end of 2015, country nationals numbered 403 480, or 92.9% of the population. The share of non-nationals in the population has more than doubled since 2005 (NSO, 2007). By the end of 2015, 3.6% of the population consisted of nationals from other Member States, while the share of third country nationals from outside the EU was 3.5% (Figure 1). Immigration has been the main driver of recent population growth. Reversing the decline between 2011 and 2013 ⁽²⁾, the recent increase in live births from 4 032 in 2013 to 4 325 in 2015 also contributed, but to a lesser extent.

Figure 1.

Population by nationality end 2015



Source: NSO, 2016b.

Like many other Member States, Malta is ageing rapidly. Life expectancy in Malta has increased to 84.2 years for females and 79.8 years for males and now surpasses the EU-28 average (83.6 and 78.1, respectively) ⁽³⁾. At the start of 2016, one out of four Maltese was 60 or older (NSO, 2016b).

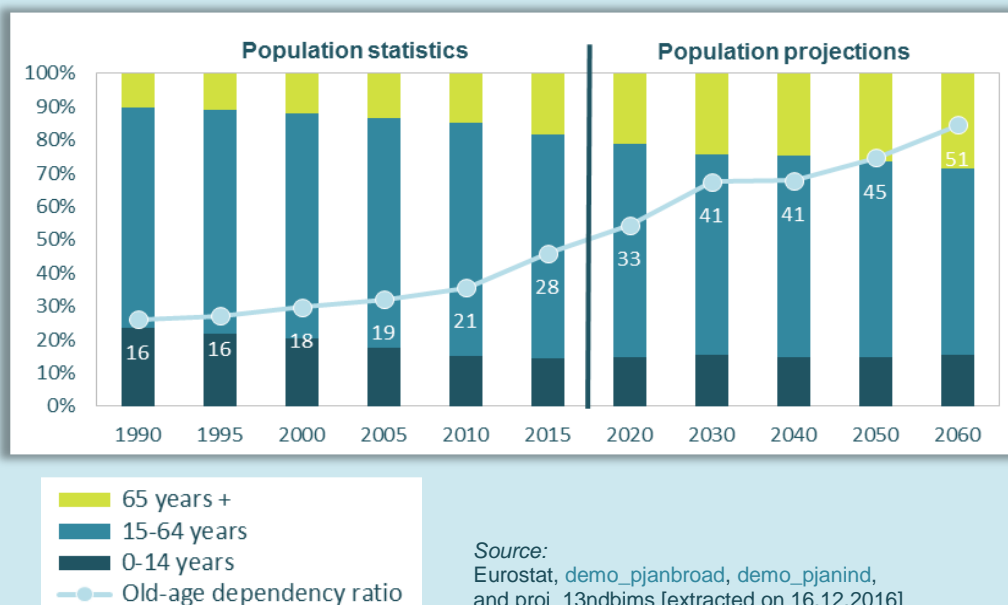
Since 1990, the share of older people (65+) in the population has steadily increased at the expense of the young (0 to 14) people (Figure 2). In the coming decades the share of young people is expected to remain stable, but the working age population is likely to decline from over 67% in 2015 to around 56% in 2060. While Malta was the Member State experiencing the fastest increase in the share of those aged 65+ in the past decade, expected developments in the age structure of the population until 2060 roughly mirror future trends for the EU as a whole. The changing age structure of the population will, nevertheless, have profound implications. The old-age dependency ratio, an indicator for demographic pressure on the population of working age, is expected to increase by 23 percentage points from 28% in 2015 to 51% in 2060.

⁽²⁾ Eurostat: *Number of live births*, [tps00111](#) (11.8.2016).

⁽³⁾ Eurostat: *Life expectancy at birth, by sex*, [tps00025](#) (11.8.2016).

Figure 2.

Population trends by age group and dependency ratio



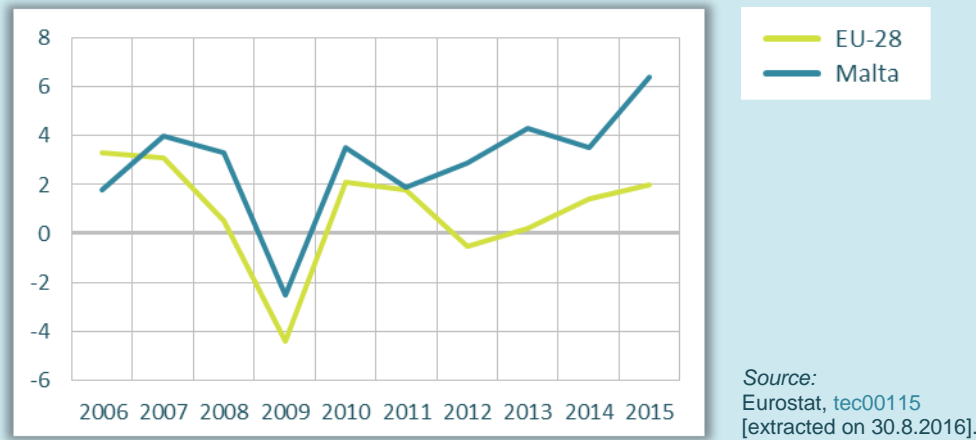
1.2. Economy and employment trends

With virtually no natural resources, Malta's small economy has always had to be versatile in adapting to dynamic global realities. It has demonstrated resilience in the challenging macroeconomic environment of recent years. After the 2009 recession, real gross domestic product (GDP) growth quickly recovered to 6.4% in 2015, more than three times higher than real GDP growth in the EU-28 as a whole and exceeding the pre-crisis peak (Figure 3).

Household consumption and exports have been the main growth engines. One-off large-scale projects in the energy sector and the finalisation of EU-funded projects boosted investment in 2014-15 and contributed strongly to the expansion of the economy ⁽⁴⁾. Future 'real GDP growth is projected to moderate somewhat [...], but remains higher than the long-term average. As a result of the [long-term] robust economic performance, Malta's GDP per capita is projected to reach 97% of the EU average in 2017' (European Commission, 2016a, p. 1).

⁽⁴⁾ These projects were implemented in the following sectors: heritage and tourism, equal opportunities, health, research, science and technology, education, lifelong learning and employment; environment, climate change and renewable energy sources, waste management and risk prevention, public infrastructure, public administration, and aid schemes for the private sector. More information via: Investing in your future: *Projects: Private sector*: <https://investinginyourfuture.gov.mt/projects/private-sector-16842760/>

Figure 3.
Real GDP growth compared to the previous year (%)



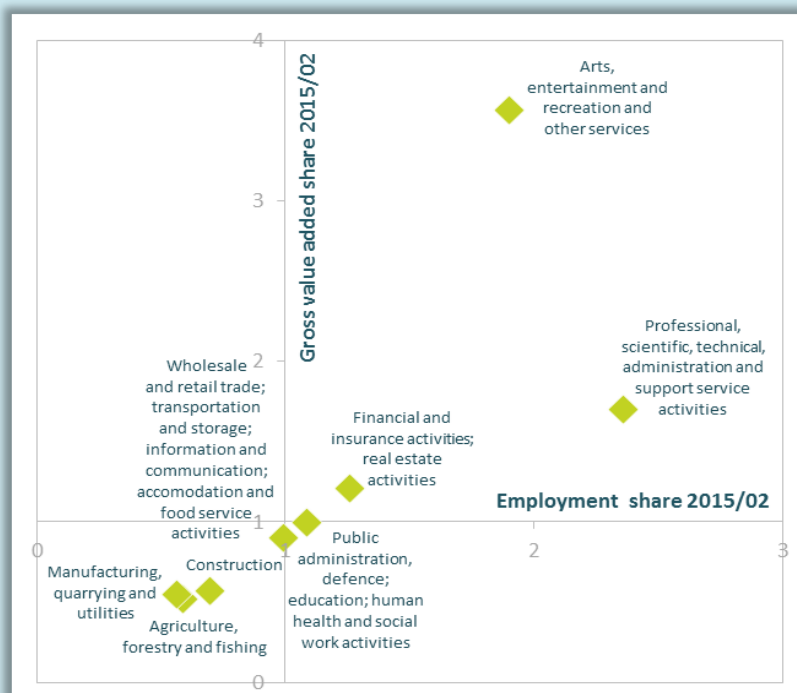
Recent GDP growth is mostly driven by services. Between 2014 and 2015 the value of goods and services produced in wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service sectors increased by 9.6%. For professional, scientific and technical activities, administrative and support service activities, the increase was 17.9%. The value of non-marketed services (public administration and defence, education, human health and social work activities) increased by 6.9% (NSO, 2016b).

The expansion of services has gone hand-in-hand with a steady decline in the share of manufacturing in gross value added, shrinking by around half since Malta joined the EU in 2004. The relative contribution of construction to the economy has also declined considerably. The already marginal share of value added by agriculture has decreased further, keeping the country heavily dependent on imported food supplies. Declining sectors are being replaced by i-gaming, financial services, legal and accounting services, and aircraft maintenance. Supported by the traditionally strong tourism sector, retail and wholesale trade, and public services, these expanding activities are becoming the new growth drivers in the economy.

Long-term trends changing the relative importance of sectors in the economy have driven shifts in the sectoral structure of employment towards services (Figure 4). The transition to a services-based economy has been faster than in many other Member States. The employment share of services in Malta grew from 67% in 2000 to 78.9% in 2014. In the EU-28 as a whole, the shares were 66.1% and 73.1%, respectively.

Figure 4.

Gross value added and employment shares in 2015 relative to 2002



NB:
Time series breaks in gross value added in manufacturing and professional services in 2014 and 2015 could slightly affect the magnitude of the presented trends.

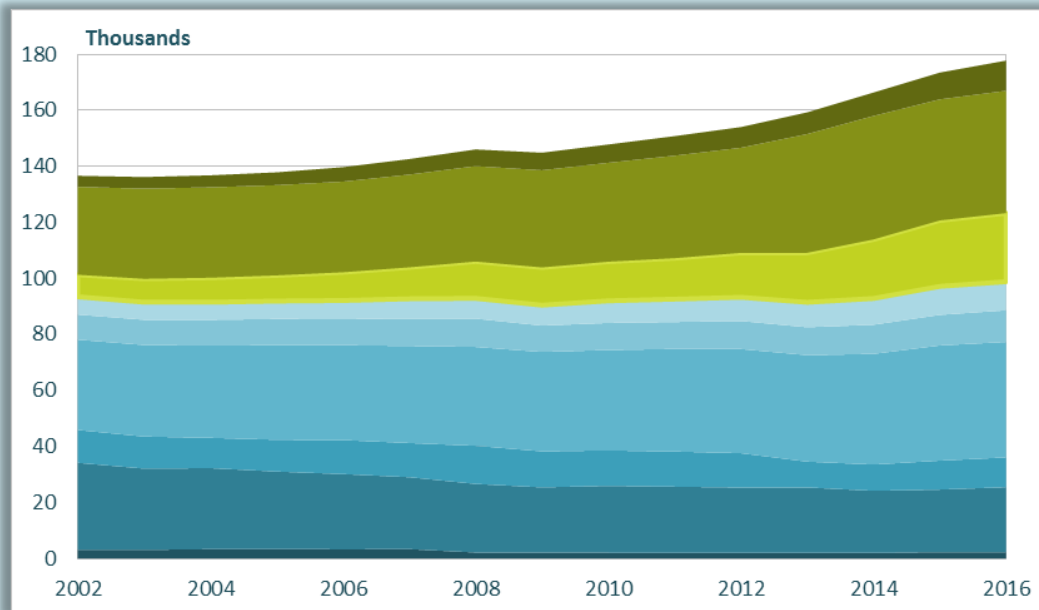
Source:
Eurostat, *nama_10_a10* [extracted on 1.10.2016]; and Jobsplus, *Full-time employment by economic sector (2002-15)* [extracted on 5.10.2016].

Changes in the sectoral composition of employment have coincided with an overall increase in the number of jobs. Registration data collected by Malta's public employment service Jobsplus show that full-time employment has grown by over 30% since 2002 ⁽⁵⁾. While it declined in agriculture, manufacturing and construction, full-time employment in all other sectors has been growing (Figure 5). Part-time employment has more than doubled since 2002, predominantly because this form of employment has become more common in service sectors. Recent employment developments reinforce long-term trends. In April 2016, full-time employment reached 177 751, up 4.3% compared to a year earlier. In the administrative and support services and in the arts, entertainment and recreation – in particular the expanding gambling and betting industry – employment growth was highest ⁽⁶⁾.

⁽⁵⁾ Jobsplus registration data are not directly comparable to labour force survey (LFS) estimates using international definitions, but enable more detailed and reliable analysis of sectoral employment shifts over time.

⁽⁶⁾ As a result of a one percentage point drop in registered unemployment, the increase in the labour force (nationally defined as full-time gainfully employed plus registered unemployed) was 3.2%. Labour force survey (LFS) estimates indicate a total employment of 191 384 (2016 second quarter), imply a labour force increase of 2.9% and an employment increase of 3.5% compared to a year earlier.

Figure 5.
Full-time employment by sector



Fast increasing employment

- Arts, entertainment and recreation and other services
- Public administration, defence; education; human health and social work activities
- Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities

Growing employment

- Financial and insurance activities; real estate activities
- Accommodation and food service activities
- Wholesale and retail trade; transportation and storage; information and communication

Shrinking employment

- Construction
- Manufacturing, quarrying and utilities
- Agriculture, forestry and fishing

Source: Jobsplus, *Full-time employment by economic sector (2002-15)* [extracted on 5.10.2016].

Women have played a more important role in employment expansion than men. Labour force survey (LFS) estimates based on the population aged 15 to 64 show that although their employment rate (52.5%) remains below the EU average and that of males (78.3%), it has increased by over 15% points since 2005, when only one out of three women was in employment ⁽⁷⁾.

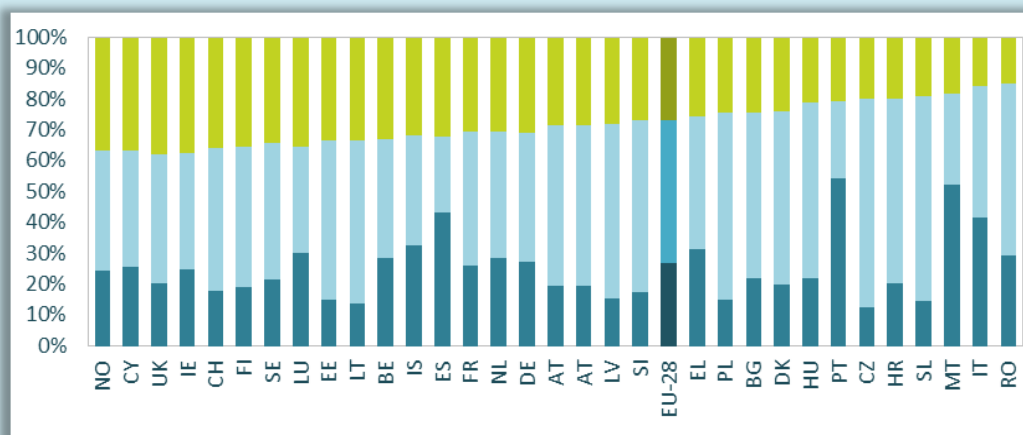
⁽⁷⁾ Mid-2016, among the total population (men and women) between 15 and 64, 66 out of every 100 people were employed.

The marked increase in non-nationals has also been an important feature of the expanding labour market ⁽⁸⁾. Between 2002 and end-2015, the number of (full- and part-time) employed foreign nationals increased sevenfold and their share in total employment grew from 2.5 to 13.8%. Most (71.5%) originate from another Member State, 27.2% are third country nationals and 0.8% come from an EFTA country. Many are employed in expanding sectors such as services, tourism and recreation, trade or ICT. Foreign workers have had a strong positive impact on the economy: they contributed significantly to economic growth and increased tax revenues (Central Bank of Malta, 2016).

1.3. Education attainment

In 2000, 81.9% of the Maltese workforce had at best an ISCED 0-2 qualification (European Commission, 2016a, p. 24). Since then the situation has markedly improved.

Figure 6.
Population (15 to 64) by highest level of education attained in 2015



NB:
Data based on ISCED 2011.
ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education;
ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education;
ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education.

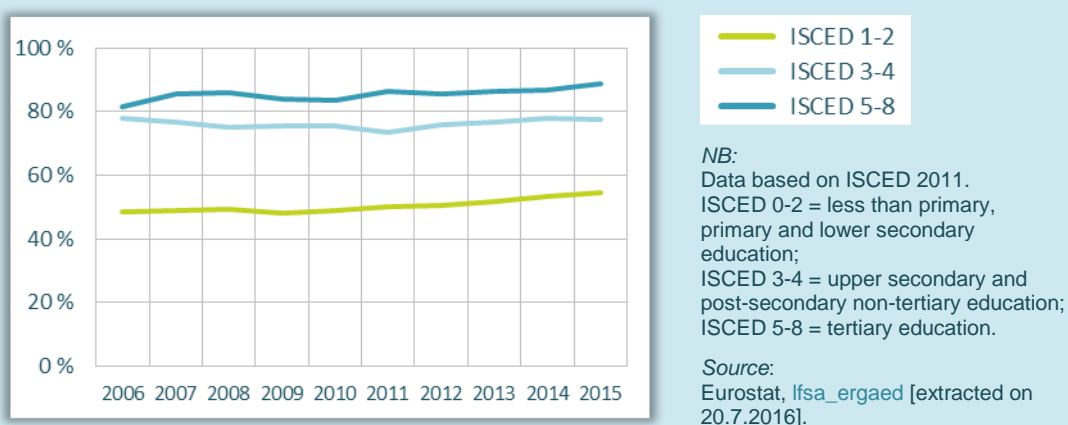
Source:
Eurostat, ifsa_pgaed [extracted on 14.7.2016].

⁽⁸⁾ Detailed information at Jobsplus: Resources: *Foreign nationals employment trends*: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/labour-market-information/foreigners-data>

In 2015 52.4% of the 15+ population had a low (ISCED 0-2) level of education ⁽⁹⁾, 29.5% an upper secondary or post-secondary non-tertiary level of education (ISCED 3-4) and 18.2% a tertiary qualification (ISCED 5-6) (Figure 6). Developments in the last 15 years reflect extensive investment in education and training. The inflow of foreigners also contributed to rising attainment levels; they often have a tertiary qualification and relatively few are low-skilled (European Commission, 2016a).

Recent analysis suggests that the national Europe 2020 target set for the share of 30 to 34 year-olds with tertiary level attainment is within reach. The share was 27.8% in 2015 but if, as expected, the upward trend (+5.6 percentage points in the last five years) continues, the target of 33% can be met on time (NCFHE, 2016a).

Figure 7.
Employment rate (20 to 64) by highest level of education attained

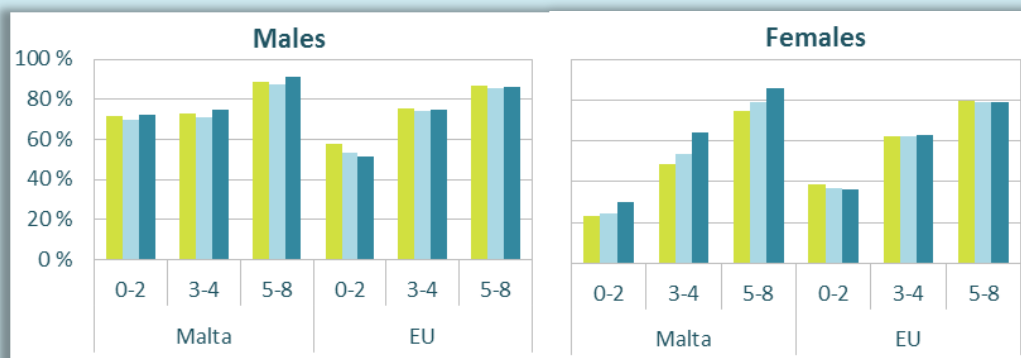


Education levels and employment rates are correlated (Figure 7). In 2015 the employment rate for those with a higher education qualification (88.7%, ISCED 5-8) was 19.1% higher than that of people with upper and post-secondary non-tertiary education (69.6%, ISCED 3-4), and 36.7% higher than that of people with low or no education (52%, ISCED 0-2). In 2015 employment rates at all attainment levels in Malta surpassed EU-28 averages, at 42.8%, 64.8% and 79.5%, respectively. This is partly due to slowly increasing employment rates among the low (ISCED 0-2) and the high (ISCED 5-8) skilled in the last decade, a trend in the Maltese labour market that is not observed in the EU as a whole.

⁽⁹⁾ In the national context this means less than five passes in secondary education certificate examinations or equivalent qualifications (Chapter 2).

Overall employment rates and trends mask important gender differences (Figure 8). The effect of education attainment on employment is more pronounced for females than it is for males. And, although decreasing, among the low-skilled there is still a large and higher than EU-average gender gap in employment rates. At medium and higher education attainment levels, gender differences in employment rates have narrowed over time.

Figure 8.
Employment rate by gender by highest level of education attained



NB:

Data based on ISCED 2011.

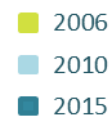
ISCED 0-2 = less than primary, primary and lower secondary education;

ISCED 3-4 = upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education;

ISCED 5-8 = tertiary education.

Source:

Eurostat, Ifsa_ergaed [extracted on 30.8.2016].



Even though unemployment in Malta is low (4.8% in 2016, third quarter), the impact of education is significant. The unemployment rate for the low-skilled (20 to 64) has typically been three to four times higher in the past decade than the corresponding rate for people with tertiary education. The unemployment rate for those with a medium level qualification, although higher than the rate for high-skilled people, has, in most years, been less than half of the unemployment rate of the low-skilled.

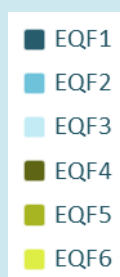
1.4. Prospects and challenges VET

Vocational education and training (VET) has become an increasingly popular option for learners after compulsory education, with participation more than tripling since 2000; in 2015 it exceeded participation in academic tracks for the first time. Rising VET participation has coincided with an overall increase in post-compulsory

education participation among 17-year-olds, from 45% in 2002 to 79% in 2015 (NCFHE, 2016a). At 63%, post-compulsory education participation among 19-year-olds is much lower and has been relatively stable since 2013. Early leaving from education and training is decreasing but, at 19.8% in 2015, it is still the second highest in the EU (Chapter 2). Work remains to be done to keep more young people engaged in education and training, and VET will continue to play a key role.

Most 2015 VET graduates completed a programme leading to European qualifications framework (EQF) level 2, 3, or 4 qualification (Figure 9) ⁽¹⁰⁾. The majority came from four major study areas. At EQF levels 3 and 4 (certificate and diploma level programmes) most graduates were in health and social care related studies. At EQF level 5 (higher diplomas) they graduated mostly from ICT and business and administration programmes. ICT and arts and humanities programmes delivered most graduates with an EQF level 6 qualification ⁽¹¹⁾, suggesting many achieving a qualification relevant to employment in the expanding and diversifying services sector.

Figure 9.
VET graduates by programme level,
academic year 2014/15



Source: NCFHE 2016.

Good preparation for jobs in demand is important, but not a guarantee of finding a matching job. Although the share of employed VET graduates reporting a good match within two years after graduation appears to be increasing slowly, many of them, especially at lower levels, still claim their job does not well match the level and field of their qualification. This contrasts with young people employed with a higher VET or academic degree. Among these, a clear majority

⁽¹⁰⁾ For more information about the national qualifications framework, see Section 3.2.

⁽¹¹⁾ Section 2.3 provides detailed information on these VET programmes.

is in a matching job within two years of completing their programme (MEDE, 2015).

Developments in the supply of VET graduates must be viewed in the context of challenges across the entire skills spectrum resulting from labour market and other relevant trends. The current situation is one of quasi full-employment, with employers facing difficulties in recruiting appropriately skilled workers in highly skilled occupations, particularly in the health care, financial and ICT sectors, but also unskilled workers in the hospitality and tourism sector.

Recently, vacancies for clerical support workers and service and sales workers have been particularly hard to fill. Vacancies for craft and related trade workers, professionals, technicians and service/sales workers took longest to fill. Employers view lack of applicants with the required skills (56.2%), attitude or personality deficits (43.7%), and a low number of applicants in general (37.7%) as core bottlenecks. People that do apply often lack technical, written communication, problem-solving and team-working skills (NCFHE et al., 2016).

Past labour market trends are expected to continue in the near future. Cedefop's skill forecast points towards increasing employment in business services and the distribution and transport sectors; employment in the primary and manufacturing sectors will continue to decrease. Although many job vacancies are likely to require a tertiary education level, considerable job opportunities for workers with medium-level qualifications will remain as a result of employers having to replace older workers leaving the labour market in the near future (European Commission, 2016a, p. 25). This will also be the case in sectors with overall shrinking employment.

These trends point towards areas for future development. Further investing in increasing the skilled workforce supply is needed to satisfy the skill needs of the expanding economy and to maintain momentum in sustaining increases in educational attainment. Avoiding skill bottlenecks becoming barriers to economic growth requires expanding opportunities for people to develop their employability early in life and maintain it throughout their careers. This is a challenge due to comparatively high rates of early school leaving and inactive older workers (MEDE, 2014a).

The government invests heavily in education and in the VET system, and spending has increased in recent years. VET policies and reform have been complemented by employment policies focused on bringing down barriers to labour market participation. These include several making-work-pay measures complemented by in-work benefits and youth guarantee initiatives to empower

NEETS ⁽¹²⁾. Focusing on NEETs and early leavers addresses the problems and issues young people face at an early stage, helping avoid inactivity later in life.

The role of VET in addressing the challenges of ageing is also widely acknowledged. The national ageing strategy highlights continuing VET access and proposes ways to widen it, tailor it better to learning needs and styles of older generations and support and train facilitators and instructors accordingly (National Commission for Active Aging, 2014). The offer of part-time VET programmes targeting employed adults in need of upskilling is widening, publicly provided lifelong learning opportunities are being promoted, and possibilities for validating non-formal and informal learning are expanding. These are positive signs, but with only around 7% of adults between 25 and 64 participating in lifelong learning in 2015 much remains to be done ⁽¹³⁾.

⁽¹²⁾ Not in education, employment or training.

⁽¹³⁾ Eurostat: [tsdsc440](#) [extracted on 3.3.2017].



CHAPTER 2.

Provision of VET

2.1. Historical roots

The roots of vocational and technical education in Malta lie in the 14th century ⁽¹⁴⁾. Most at that time served the building trade, furniture production and silver work. Guilds offered informal training within complex apprenticeship and initiation systems. The order of the Knights of St John (16th to 18th centuries) invested in training for ship building and repair and eventually set up a school of navigation. The British exploited Malta's strategic position and maritime traditions to develop their Mediterranean fleet. By 1807 the naval commissioner had issued a call for apprentices for a seven-year course, the forerunner of the dockyard school which became the main technical education provider in the 19th and 20th centuries.

⁽¹⁴⁾ This section is based on the work of Sultana (1995; 2001).

Technical education was strengthened after World War II. The 1952 Industrial Training Act made employers responsible for investing in training and regulated apprenticeships. Using the British model as a blueprint, government established several secondary technical schools emphasising academic instruction in the 1950s and 1960s. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST, known as the polytechnic at the time) offered programmes in hotel administration, commerce and business studies, and civil, mechanical and electrical engineering. Participation in technical education increased steadily, but MCAST closed in 1977 and was transformed into a ‘new university’.

In the 1970s government reformed the compulsory education system and set up parallel trade schools to cater for students who ‘felt they were either unable or unwilling to go on with academic schooling’ (Sultana, 1995, p. 53). These new vocational schools allocated 75% of instruction time to teaching trades. In the same period technical institutes offering post-compulsory education were consolidated.

During the late 1980s and 1990s trade schools received less attention than mainstream education. Lagging investment and insufficient development led to their phasing out, leaving the country without vocational education and training (VET) options at compulsory level. MCAST re-emerged in 2001, clustering most post-compulsory VET institutes existing at the time. Its reestablishment started a new era of VET in Malta and has been a catalyst for developing high quality VET inspired by success of existing providers such as the Institute of Tourism Studies, which was set up in 1987.

2.2. VET in Malta’s education and training system

Since the 1970s, the process of tailoring the Maltese education and training system to national needs, through policies and reforms, has been driven by equity and quality aims. It reflects the ambition to help all children and young people reach their potential and become active citizens and lifelong learners ⁽¹⁵⁾.

The current system (Figure 10) distinguishes between compulsory and further and higher education ⁽¹⁶⁾. Compulsory education (age 5 to 16) is offered by State schools (53% of learners), the Catholic Church (36%) and independent schools (11%) and encompasses:

⁽¹⁵⁾ The 2006 reform gave providers more autonomy in decision-making and separated the regulatory and the provider roles of the central education authority. The reform currently under way modernises the legislative framework.

⁽¹⁶⁾ This report refers to these terms but mostly uses internationally comparable terminology to help foreign readers understand the system.

- (a) the early learning years cycle (kindergarten one to two and years one to two);
- (b) the junior years cycle (years three to six);
- (c) the secondary years cycle at middle (years seven to eight) and senior secondary schools (years 9 to 11) ⁽¹⁷⁾.

The national curriculum framework presently in place eases transition between cycles, consolidating and building on learning experiences over time (MEDE, 2012).

At the end of compulsory schooling, students sit examinations administered by schools. Schools issue an overall secondary school certificate and profile reflecting learning achievements (at EQF levels 1-3) and certifications for separate subjects. Most students also take part in national secondary education certificate (SEC) exams, leading to separate certifications for subjects (typically 6 to 10) at EQF levels 2-3 ⁽¹⁸⁾. VET programmes leading to EQF level 1-3 qualifications (Section 2.3) help those not (fully) succeeding in general education progress to higher attainment levels.

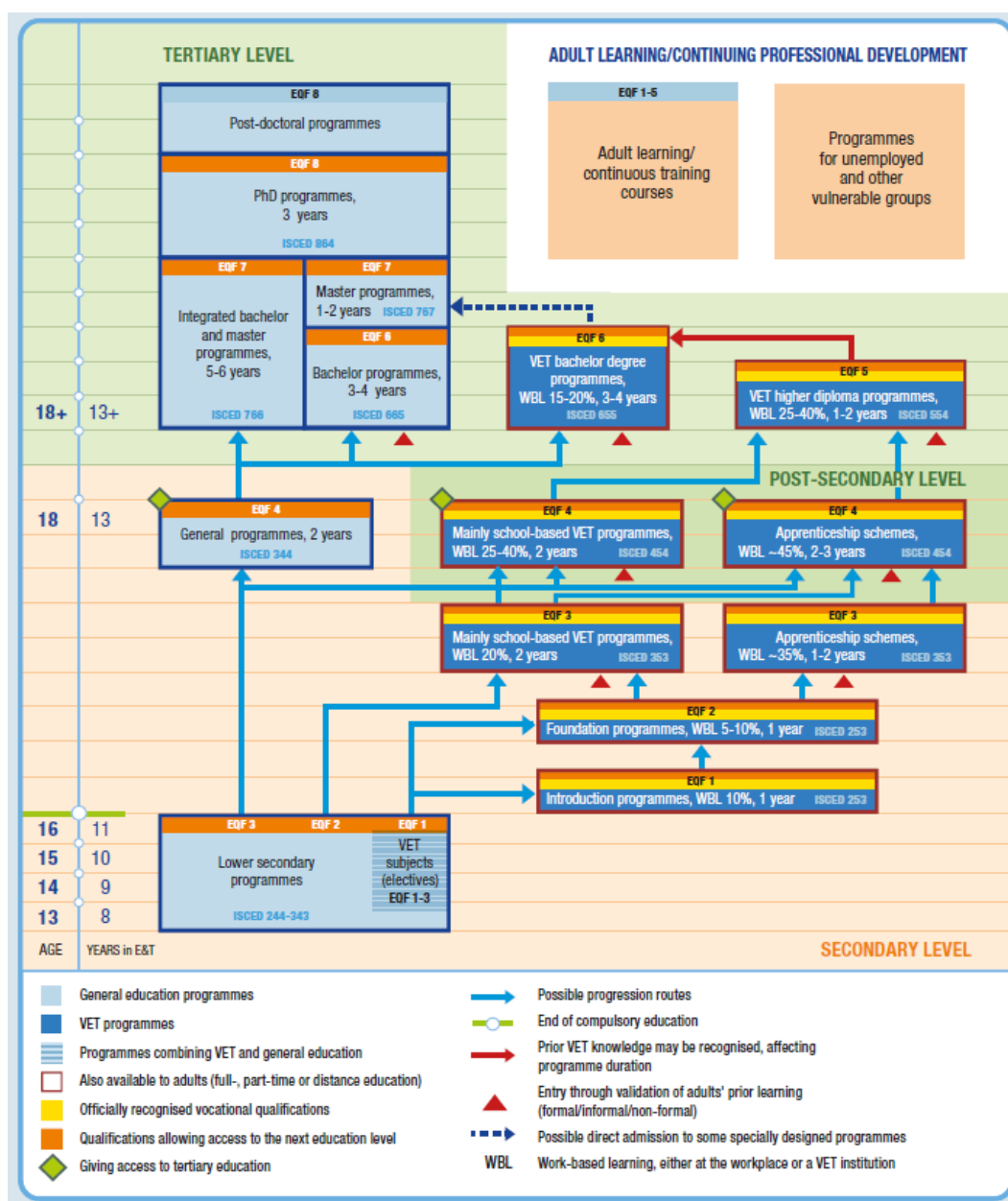
Learners with six SEC passes can enter sixth form provided they meet subject and grade requirements. This two-year general education follow-up programme offered by State, church and independent schools, prepares learners for the matriculation certificate, a qualification giving access to higher education. Alternatively, these students can enter a VET programme at one of the State providers: the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), or the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), or – in some cases – a private provider. These lead to EQF level 4 qualifications and also open up progression opportunities to higher vocational (at the ITS and MCAST) and academic tertiary education (at the University of Malta).

The system has limited flexibility for students to move from VET to a general/academic pathway and vice versa. The transition from post-compulsory education to higher education is compartmentalised. A tracer study among 2013/14 graduates showed 16.5% with a general post-compulsory qualification pursuing higher VET and only 11.9% of VET graduates continuing in academic higher education (NCFHE and MEDE, 2016, p. 31).

⁽¹⁷⁾ Senior secondary education is the term used nationally. Programmes offered by senior secondary schools are lower secondary programmes.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The MATSEC (matriculation and secondary education certificate) board assesses general qualifications (EQF levels 2-4, certificate and advance levels) and vocational qualifications in compulsory education (EQF levels 2-3).

Figure 10.
VET in Malta's education and training system, 2017



NB: ISCED-P 2011.

Source: Cedefop and ReferNet Malta.

2.3. Government regulated initial VET

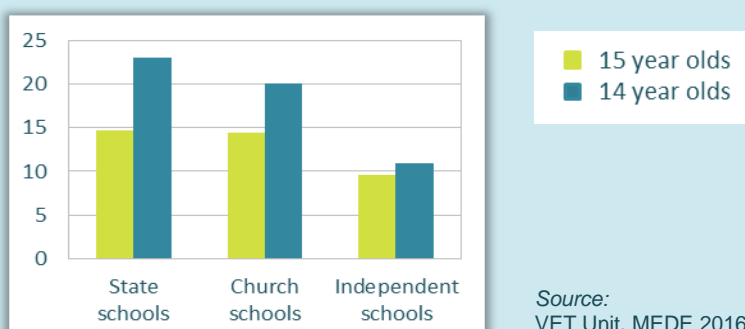
2.3.1. VET subjects in compulsory education

Since 2015, all compulsory education students aged 14 to 16 in State, church and some independent schools, have the option to select up to two VET subjects. These

subjects respond to several studies and policy documents advocating their reintroduction ⁽¹⁹⁾. Industry priorities and labour market needs informed the offer: agribusiness, engineering technology, health and social care, hospitality, and information technology.

VET subjects were mainstreamed as part of the national curriculum framework and in line with Malta's education strategy after successful pilots in 2011, which included training to prepare teachers (MEDE, 2014b). Learners are engaged and obtain good results: data based on three cohorts of year 11 students show 92% of them passing with 70% obtaining the highest grade. Since their national introduction, take-up has increased in all types of secondary schools; students in the second cohort (aged 14) having the possibility to include VET subjects did so more often than those in the first cohort (aged 15) with this option (Figure 11).

Figure 11.
Uptake (%) of VET subjects by school type in 2016/17



In 2016/17 the most popular VET subjects were information technology and hospitality, followed by health and social care and engineering technology (Figure 12). As only a few schools have the facilities and resources to offer it, fewer students include agribusiness in their programme.

⁽¹⁹⁾ Trade schools offered programmes with VET components (Sultana, 1992; Ventura and Murphy, 1998; Ventura, 2005; Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, 2005).

Figure 12.
Share (%) of 14-year-olds following VET subjects in 2016/17



Source:
VET Unit, MEDE 2016.

2.3.2. Post-compulsory VET

VET programmes for students over 16 are provided at lower secondary, upper secondary and post-secondary (non-tertiary) level ⁽²⁰⁾. The qualification level they reach in compulsory education (EQF level 1, 2, or 3) defines at what level they can start VET and determines progression routes:

- (a) for students with an EQF level 1 qualification: one-year introduction and foundation programmes (lower secondary, ISCED-P 253) leading to an EQF level 1 or 2 certificate. They integrate key competences within the vocational aspects of the curriculum, include work experience, and give access to studies at the next EQF level in the same field. The most popular fields of study are manufacturing and construction and arts and humanities. Foundation certificate holders can continue VET in one- to two-year apprenticeship schemes (upper secondary, ISCED-P 353) leading to a VET diploma (EQF level 3);
- (b) for students with an EQF level 2 compulsory education qualification: two-year, mainly school- (college-)based programmes (upper secondary, ISCED-P 353) leading to a VET diploma (EQF level 3). These programmes include some work-based learning and give access to programmes at the next level. Most graduates finish with a qualification in ICT, health and welfare or business, administration and law. Foundation certificate holders can access these programmes as well;

⁽²⁰⁾ The term 'further education' is used nationally to capture all post-compulsory education (including VET options) prior to higher education. National terminology deviates from what is common in international comparisons of education and training systems.

- (c) for those with an EQF level 3 compulsory education qualification: VET programmes (post-secondary, ISCED-P 454) leading to an advanced VET diploma (EQF level 4). There are school (college)-based two-year programmes and two- to three-year apprenticeship schemes. Some programmes can be followed either college-based or on apprenticeship ⁽²¹⁾. VET diploma (EQF level 3) holders can enter these programmes as well.

Apprenticeship programmes are provided by MCAST. Contracts between learners, employers and the college govern the schemes. In the current system, the share of workplace learning is not regulated: it varies by field of study and is set by the college. Apprentices receive remuneration for the on-the-job training from employers and a stipend from the government ⁽²²⁾. At the ITS, work-based learning in the form of 14-week local industrial trade practice during summer is compulsory for in programmes up to EQF level 3. EQF level 4 ITS programmes include a mandatory 12-month internship abroad.

2.3.3. VET in higher education

Higher VET includes:

- (a) two-year college-based programmes (ISCED-P 554) leading to higher VET diplomas at EQF level 5. A VET advanced diploma (EQF level 4) is required for entry. Higher VET diplomas are equivalent to a degree after the first two years of a university programme; they allow entry to the third year of VET bachelor programmes provided graduates meet entry requirements. Higher VET diploma graduates from the ITS can pursue a bachelor in tourism programme at the University of Malta;
- (b) three- to four-year bachelor programmes (ISCED 655, leading to EQF level 6) which open up progression opportunities to selected academic master programmes ⁽²³⁾. VET bachelor programmes are open to:
 - (i) sixth-form graduates with two advanced and two intermediate level passes ⁽²⁴⁾;
 - (ii) MCAST advanced diploma (EQF level 4) graduates;
 - (iii) VET higher diploma programme graduates (see above);

⁽²¹⁾ It is the intention to prioritise the apprenticeship route for these programmes in the future and to phase out the school-based route.

⁽²²⁾ Learners on work placements and internships have no statutory right to remuneration but receive maintenance grants from the government (see also Chapter 4).

⁽²³⁾ Currently only at MCAST. The ITS starts two VET bachelor programmes in 2017.

⁽²⁴⁾ Entry requirements in terms of subjects vary by programme.

- (c) three-year part-time VET master programmes (EQF level 7) at MCAST ⁽²⁵⁾. In 2016/17 an MBA for small business and a master of business informatics programmes were offered for the first time. Graduates with an academic bachelor degree from the University of Malta (or any other university recognised by the NCFHE) or an MCAST VET bachelor degree can enter these programmes.

Work-based learning in higher VET takes the form of internships and/or entrepreneurship training. A 12-month internship abroad is compulsory for ITS students in the hospitality management programme (EQF level 5). MCAST offers work placement opportunities abroad and includes entrepreneurship training in its VET bachelor degree courses.

2.3.4. VET programme offer and participation

At State VET providers MCAST and ITS, full-time programmes cover a wide range of fields (Table 1) ⁽²⁶⁾. The offer has been expanding: MCAST introduced 17 new programmes in 2014/15 and 17 in 2016/17. With many recently introduced VET options and programmes, and changes in the organisational structure of provision, it is challenging to point towards detailed long-term trends in participation. Overall, participation in initial vocational education and training (IVET) programmes is on the rise. Over 6 700 full-time students were enrolled at MCAST in 2016/17: this is a 2% increase compared to a year earlier and up by more than 20% since 2009/10. Recently, the institutes for community services, business management and commerce, and engineering and transport registered the largest increases, with most learners enrolling in full-time EQF level 4 programmes.

Table 1.
Fields of study on offer at State VET providers in 2016/17

Institute	Full-time programmes in:	Provider
Applied sciences	Horticulture, animal care, veterinary/animal care, fish management, applied sciences, pharmacy, health sciences, environmental sustainability/engineering, chemical technology, food technology	MCAST
Creative arts	Art and design, performing arts, media, creative media production, printing, fine arts, game art and visual design, interactive media, photography, product design, spatial design, creative arts, journalism, cultural heritage	MCAST

⁽²⁵⁾ In the first two years students acquire a postgraduate certificate and diploma.

⁽²⁶⁾ A complete overview of courses on offer is available on the providers' websites: <http://www.mcast.edu.mt/> and <http://www.its.edu.mt/>

Institute	Full-time programmes in:	Provider
Engineering and transport	Construction engineering, building services engineering, mechanical engineering, civil engineering, electrical and electronic engineering, robotics, biomedical engineering, electronics, construction and installation trades, welding, furniture design, manufacturing, plumbing, aircraft maintenance, aviation, automotive, marine engineering	MCAST
Business management and commerce	Business, office skills, postal services, financial services, marketing, accounting, insurance, business administration, secretarial, business informatics	MCAST
Community services	Care, hairdressing, sport, beauty, health and social care, children's care, inclusive education	MCAST
Information & communication technology	ICT, systems and networks, software development, user support, multimedia, business analytics	MCAST
Tourism studies	Hospitality and tourism, rooms division, events and leisure, food and beverage operations, food preparation and production	ITS

Source: MCAST, 2016; ITS, 2016; MCAST (<http://www.mcast.edu.mt/>) and ITS (<http://www.its.edu.mt/>) websites [accessed 8.3.2017].

2.4. Reforming work-based learning

Reform of apprenticeship was launched in 2014 following 2013 and 2014 European semester country-specific recommendations ⁽²⁷⁾. It merged off-the-job education and on-the-job learning in a single apprenticeship scheme and helped place more emphasis on quality. It also strengthened the role of employers in assessment and set the stage for fully implementing a three-tier framework comprising work placements (EQF levels 1-4), apprenticeships (EQF levels 3-4) and internships (EQF level 5 and above). Attracting more learners to VET by expanding work-based learning and motivating them to stay in labour market relevant programmes, the reform contributes to reducing early leaving.

MCAST took over administration of apprenticeships from the public employment service Jobsplus in 2014 and renamed it the national apprenticeship scheme ⁽²⁸⁾. Recent developments at MCAST, reflecting the ambition to ensure quality work-based learning opportunities (apprenticeship, internship or work exposure) in all its programmes, include:

⁽²⁷⁾ European Commission: *European Semester 2016*:
http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm

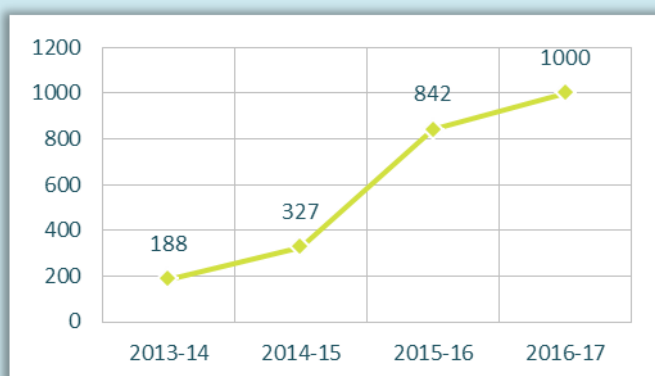
⁽²⁸⁾ Jobsplus is the successor to the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). The 2016 name change is part of a wider strategy to position Jobsplus as an innovative and dynamic organisation that excels in meeting needs of employers, jobseekers and employees.

- (a) mainstreaming pilot projects (placements, apprenticeship and internship) into full-time programmes;
- (b) developing work-based vocational competences for all apprenticeship programmes, serving as assessment benchmarks (apprenticeships office);
- (c) making internship compulsory in all EQF level 6 programmes;
- (d) launching an entrepreneurship centre (in collaboration with Malta Enterprise) to give learners opportunities to transform innovative ideas into profitable and sustainable business ventures.

Apprenticeship has expanded to new sectors and participation has increased more than five-fold since 2013 (Figure 13) ⁽²⁹⁾. MCAST is now able to offer over half of its EQF level 3 and 4 programmes as apprenticeship. In 2016/17 around 18% of its students in EQF level 3 programmes are apprentices; apprenticeship take-up in level 4 programmes is 40%.

Figure 13.

Students on apprenticeship at MCAST



Source: MCAST 2017.

Legislation proposed in 2016 ⁽³⁰⁾ – spearheaded by Cedefop's (2015a) apprenticeship review – aims at strengthening work-based learning and apprenticeship by:

- (a) setting definitions and operational parameters for work placements, apprenticeships and internships;

⁽²⁹⁾ The upward trend mirrors employer involvement. National data show 900 companies are interested in work-based learning schemes. Some 437 companies offered apprenticeship sponsorship between 2013 and 2016 and the total number of apprenticeship places offered in 2015-16 was 455.

⁽³⁰⁾ In consultation end December 2016 (MEDE, 2016c).

- (b) outlining responsibilities and governance structures (such as national skills council, sector skills units);
- (c) defining rights and obligations for VET providers, employers and learners;
- (d) highlighting the role of employers as responsible learning partners;
- (e) setting a compulsory minimum number of hours for all forms of work-based learning and linking remuneration to the minimum wage;
- (f) using ECVET/ECTS in all forms of work-based learning;
- (g) introducing a single EQF-based apprenticeship qualification replacing the dual certification currently in place;
- (h) launching a training agreements register to support data collection and policy-relevant analysis by the national skills council.

Apprenticeships will also be introduced through other providers, including private ones, to tap new areas of expertise. The aim is to make apprenticeships more inclusive and more flexible for learners, for instance by offering part-time schemes.

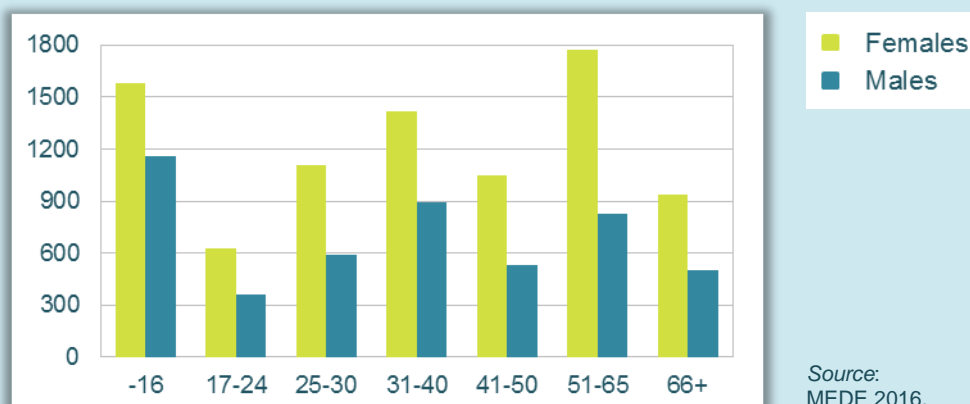
2.5. Continuing VET and lifelong learning

Government ambition is to become a learning society by developing adult education and, more specifically, continuing vocational education and training (CVET) and easing access to these forms of learning. The Ministry for Education and Employment department for lifelong learning (DLL) is the main provider of part-time adult learning courses. Its adult learning unit offers over 500 EQF level 1-5 courses in community-based learning centres, local councils and community centres. Most courses develop basic key competences, but the offer also includes CVET and visual and performing arts courses.

Apart from young people under 16 in compulsory education, who benefit from the courses offered, mostly by attending evening courses in visual and performing arts, most applicants are over 51 or aged between 31 and 40 (Figure 14). In 2016/17 17.8% of course participants chose Maltese or English language training, 4.4% opted for an ICT course and about one in seven learners started a craft- or VET-related course. There is a much larger share of female participants than male. Adult participants in basic skills courses are satisfied with their quality and organisation and see them as a tool to upgrade their skills (82%) and/or make up for chances lost earlier in life (52%) ⁽³¹⁾.

⁽³¹⁾ Results from a 2015 telephone survey among 900 basic skills participants carried out by an independent auditing firm.

Figure 14.
Course applicants by age and gender in 2016/17



State VET providers also offer CVET courses. Around 300 part-time courses at MCAST cater to adults who cannot take part in full-time programmes due to employment, business, family or other commitments (examples in Table 2). They support career development and, in some cases, enable participants to take up more specialised jobs.

The ITS offers part-time evening courses to develop skills for the hospitality and tourism industry. The offer includes fields such as food hygiene, food and beverage theory and practice, room operations, and sustainable and green tourism. ITS full VET programmes are offered part-time in morning and evening classes. Their modular set-up helps part-time learners attain a formal qualification in food preparation and service, travel and tourism operations, events and leisure operations and other fields, expanding career development opportunities for those employed in these sectors.

Table 2.
Examples of part-time CVET programmes for adults at MCAST

Institute	Programmes	EQF level
Business management and commerce	Introduction for business start-up	4
	Human resources management	4
Engineering and transport	Basic manual metal arc welding	2
	LPG installations certified installer for fitters	3
Applied sciences	Decontamination science	3
	Applied laboratory science	3
Electrical and electronics engineering	MCAST award in electrical/electronic technology	3
	Renewable energy systems and PV installations single phase	4
Information & communication technology	Computer technician course	3
	MCAST award in network design and infrastructure	4

Source: MCAST, 2017.

The public employment service Jobsplus provides VET at EQF levels 1-4, commonly leading to awards in the context of active labour market policies and other services ⁽³²⁾. Courses offered include general language and numeracy and VET employability courses, as well as a range of VET options for particular occupations in technology and ICT, the care sector, construction, hospitality and business and accounting ⁽³³⁾. Jobsplus has its own training centre.

Private organisations including NGOs, also provide CVET, lifelong learning and training programmes, as well as non-formal courses and/or informal learning opportunities.

2.6. VET legislation and governance

The 1964 constitution and the 1988 Education Act (and subsequent amendments) set the legal framework and outline the aims of the Maltese education and training system ⁽³⁴⁾. The Education Act regulates MCAST and the ITS, legislating their organisational structure and giving them the legal power to develop and issue qualifications as self-accrediting institutions. The Employment and Training Services Act regulates Jobsplus' roles and responsibilities in education and training, including the ability to issue qualifications ⁽³⁵⁾. The Ministry for Education and Employment is in charge of VET in compulsory education and at MCAST. The ITS falls under the responsibility of the Ministry for Tourism.

To implement the 2014-24 education strategy, a new legal framework for education will replace the blanket legislation currently in place with a new Education Act covering main principles, a dedicated regulatory act, and stand-alone acts governing MCAST and the ITS, as well as the University of Malta ⁽³⁶⁾.

⁽³²⁾ For more information on awards, see Section 3.2.

⁽³³⁾ Some courses (particularly in the care sector) include work placements. For the full course offer, see Jobsplus: *Full course list*: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/courses/all-course-list>. For more information on Jobsplus schemes see Chapter 4.

⁽³⁴⁾ Education Act (Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta):
<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8801>

⁽³⁵⁾ Employment and Training Services Act (1990 and subsequent amendments):
<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=8814>

⁽³⁶⁾ In consultation at the time of writing this report. The proposed draft acts can be accessed via the Ministry of Social Dialogue: *Bringing education into the 21st century*: https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Pages/Consultations/BringingEducationintothe21stcentury.aspx

After the merger of the Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE), the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) was established in 2013 ⁽³⁷⁾. As the official regulatory body for post-compulsory education, the NCFHE supports excellence through research, effective licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications established under the Malta qualifications framework (MQF) ⁽³⁸⁾. It also acts as a broker between the government and VET and higher education institutions, structures stakeholder dialogue, and oversees MQF implementation.

Social partners sit on the boards of the State VET providers. Given the small size of the country, governance structures at provider level are important; efforts to optimise them have largely been steered by providers themselves. The thematic organisation of MCAST in six institutes has helped encourage focused stakeholder dialogue and has provided a platform for employers and employee representatives to be involved in steering VET. The foundation, technical and university colleges – which structure the programme offer by programme level – were introduced in 2015 ⁽³⁹⁾. They complement the thematic structure with a view to being in a better position to develop focused strategies that balance addressing learning needs of students at different levels with employer interests and other stakeholder needs.

2.7. Funding

Public education from early childhood education and care up to tertiary level, including all IVET offered by schools and State providers up to EQF level 6, is financed by the Government ⁽⁴⁰⁾. The budget for MCAST and the ITS is part of government education expenditures. Tuition fees paid by participants in CVET courses generate extra revenue for these providers.

In recent years, the share of education in total public expenditure has been around three percentage points above the EU-28 average, while education expenditure as a share of GDP has been more than 0.5 percentage points higher than the average (Figure 15). Public expenditure on education in general and VET spending have substantially increased and – in real terms – both were

⁽³⁷⁾ *Legal notice 2012/294* consolidated the merger. See also Section 3.2.

⁽³⁸⁾ NCFHE: *About us*: <http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/aboutus/Pages/default.aspx>

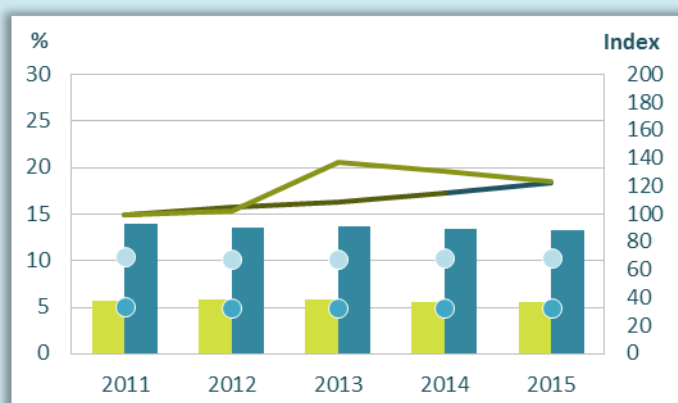
⁽³⁹⁾ Foundation college: EQF level 1-3 programmes; technical college: level 4 programmes; university college EQF: level 5-7 programmes.

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Church schools, which do not charge tuition fees, are subsidised. Tax rebates help parents with children attending independent schools cover the costs.

almost 23% higher in 2015 compared to 2011. Malta was among the few EU Member States with a greater than 5% increase in public expenditure on education in 2014 and 2015 ⁽⁴¹⁾.

Figure 15.

Public spending on education and VET



NB:
VET expenditure includes the operating budgets for MCAST and the ITS (which cover salaries), the maintenance grants for students and the costs of VET subjects in compulsory education.

- % GDP
- % of total public expenditure
- Index education expenditure (2011 prices)
- Index VET expenditure (2011 prices)
- EU-28 average
- EU-28 average

Source:
Cedefop calculations based on Eurostat (2017) gov_10a_exp [extracted on 20.1.2017] and budget information on VET expenditure obtained from ReferNet Malta.

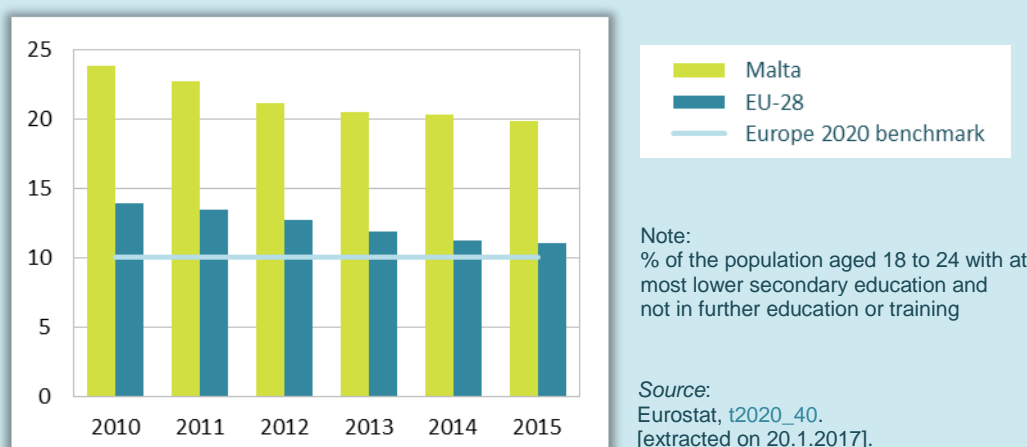
Apart from promoting skill development among the employed, jobseekers, early school leavers and NEETs, the European Social Fund (ESF) has also helped align VET better to labour market needs and supported programme development and redesign. MCAST used ESF for curriculum reform, to develop programmes for the aviation maintenance sector, to make its lifelong learning offer more accessible, for training aimed at meeting future skill needs in industry, and for a study identifying skills gaps and workforce shortages. ESF funding helped the ITS assess tourism workers skills and develop individualised training. ESF has also been used to train career guidance counsellors, to design occupational standards, to train teachers, and to implement quality assurance.

⁽⁴¹⁾ See European Commission, 2016b, p. 9; and Eurostat, COFOG database.

2.8. Addressing early leaving

Early leaving from education and training (ESL) has decreased faster than the EU average (Figure 16), but at 19.8% in 2015 it remains the second highest in the EU. While the downward trend of the last decade continues, the ESL rate is expected to be around 14% in 2020 and the 10% national ESL target – set in 2013 in line with the Europe 2020 benchmark – will be reached later (NCFHE, 2016a, pp. 28-29).

Figure 16.
Early leaving from education and training (%)



The considerable progress reflects policy focus on, and investment in, reducing ESL. The 2014 strategic prevention plan built on earlier measures and achievements, outlined a vision and reinforced governance (MEDE, 2014c). The dedicated early school leaving unit (ESLU) in the Ministry's Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers (DLL&ESL) set up in 2014 monitors implementation and progress. ESL measures (Table 3) include alternative learning options, education system features to help people re-engage with education, and support structures for vulnerable groups. Several are part of the youth guarantee.

Compared to counterparts in other Member States, who increasingly face difficulties in finding a job, most Maltese early school leavers find (low-skilled) employment ⁽⁴²⁾. But lacking basic qualification compromises employability later

⁽⁴²⁾ In 2010-15, seven out of 10 early school leavers in Malta were employed. The employment rate among early school leavers in the EU as a whole has declined from 46% in 2010 to 41.8% in 2015. Eurostat database (2017) [edat_lfse_14](http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training) and Eurostat, Statistics explained: *Early leavers from education and training*.
http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php/Early_leavers_from_education_and_training

in life, may lead to unemployment due to lacking skills, and has economic and social costs. Estimated economic impacts of reaching the 10% ESL target include a 0.65% employment increase, rising GDP (+0.62%) and an employment shift towards higher value-added activities (Ministry for Finance, 2014).

Table 3.
Core ESL prevention, intervention and compensation measures

Measure	Since	Support ESL reduction by	Reach/scope
Prevention			
VET subjects in compulsory education	2015/16 (piloted in 2011)	engaging students less inclined to follow the academic pathway and open up progression to further and higher education (see also Section 2.2.1).	905 14-year-olds (2016/17)
Institute for education	2015	developing continuing professional development for teachers and school leaders to help them support learners (see also Section 2.9).	staff administrating and providing teaching
Intervention			
Alternative learning programme (ALP)	2013/14	offering a VET-oriented second chance to 16-year-olds not sitting SEC exams at risk of becoming ESL or NEET. ALP combines compulsory education instruction (EQF levels 1-2) with learning ICT skills in the summer months (offered by Jobsplus) and support. Schools nominate 15-year-olds who would benefit most. Pilot second year ALP programmes (welding and hospitality at EQF level 3) were introduced in 2016/17.	250 (2013/14) 272 (2014/15) 261 (2015/16) 25 ALP pilot (2016/17)
revision/remedial classes	2014	offering final year compulsory education students whose insufficient grades in Maltese, English, mathematics and IT and/or science or lack of credits block progression to higher levels, free summer classes to prepare for SEC exams. MCAST offers remedial classes for students in its EQF level 1-3 programmes.	1 085 students (SEC) (2014)
Core curricular programme	2013/14	offering a VET pathway (EQF 1) to compulsory education learners facing difficulties in mainstream programmes. The core curricular programme combines VET with a reduced number of core subjects. Teacher-mentors guide learners towards further learning (e.g. MCAST foundation programmes or Youth.inc).	130 14-year-old and 130 15-year-old students (2014/15)
Prince's trust XL programme	2015	re-engaging 13 to 16 year-olds at risk of exclusion or underachievement through informal learning to foster self-confidence. XL covers personal and social development, life skills, active citizenship, enterprise projects and preparation for work and leads to an award, certificate or diploma in personal development and employability skills.	102 students in 7 lower secondary schools/centres (2015/16)
Compensation			
Foundation programmes	long standing system feature	giving early school leavers without any formal qualification the opportunity to achieve an EQF level 3 VET qualification (or higher) via EQF level 1 and 2 programmes	MCAST: 2 281 (2014/15) and 2 244 (2015/16); ITS: 62 (2014/15) and 110 (2015/16)

Measure	Since	Support ESL reduction by	Reach/scope
Guze Ellul Mercer 16+ (GEM16+)	2015	establishing a new school offering a second chance to obtain an EQF level 3 qualification in basic subjects. GEM16+ cooperates with MCAST and the ITS to help learners progress to upper secondary VET.	80 students (2015/16)
Youth.inc	2011	offering second chance full-time programmes (EQF 1 and 2) with a strong VET component and a work placement. Run by the national youth agency and aimed at young people aged 16 to 21 having completed compulsory education without acquiring basic subjects. An EQF level 3 programme was developed in 2016.	70 students (2014/15) 109 students (2015/16)
Embark for life (E4L) programme	2009 (ended)	helping vulnerable youth aged 15 to 24 with addiction problems, lack of family support or mental health challenges re-engage in education and prepare for employment through skills training	386 beneficiaries - 132 found and maintained a job or continued training
MCAST pathway programme	2009/10	helping students with intellectual challenges or learning difficulties acquire skills for employment through a two-year hands-on full-time programme including supervised work placements in the college and in work places	60 (2013/14) 57 (2014/15) 49 (2015/16)
Jobsplus NEET activation scheme II	2016	reintegrating NEETs under 25 through personalised assistance and motivational and behavioural training to prepare for further education or work exposure schemes	350 profiled 185 took part (2016) – 85.6% would recommend it to others

Sources: European Parliament (2016), ReferNet Malta and Cedefop.

Relying on the availability of low-skilled jobs for early school leavers is not sustainable. Cedefop forecasts show that most job opportunities until 2025 will require a medium or a high qualification. Studies exploring trends in the more distant future suggest many low-skilled jobs, including in services and hospitality, will be impacted by automation and some of them are likely to be (partly) replaced by robots ⁽⁴³⁾. This will not necessarily lead to declining employment overall, but the range of options for people with no or low skills will narrow.

It is important to keep working on reducing ESL – by broadening skill development opportunities and avoiding traps in dead-end and unstable jobs – to increase the life chances of young people.

⁽⁴³⁾ Bowles (2014) estimates that over half of all jobs in Malta are predicted to be significantly impacted by automation in the coming decades (see also Wood and Baya, 2016; Times of Malta, 2016).

2.9. Teacher professional development

Higher education is an entry level requirement for the teaching profession. For compulsory (not-primary) education teachers there have traditionally been two routes: a dedicated four-year bachelor of education degree programme and a one-year postgraduate certificate in education programme (EQF level 7) following a bachelor degree in a subject field.

In October 2016 the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta started developing a two-year master degree programme in teaching and learning for first-cycle degree graduates. To develop specialisations for teaching VET subjects, a working group of experts from the University of Malta, MCAST, the ITS, the Institute for Education, as well as Haaga Helia University of Applied Sciences (Finland) has been set up ⁽⁴⁴⁾.

The 2010 collective agreement between the Ministry for Education and Employment and the Malta Union of Teachers includes continuing professional development (CPD) provisions. Teachers are expected to participate in three days compulsory CPD in the subject(s) they teach every year, organised by ministry education officers in charge of their subject or by their college. Teachers not called for compulsory training can choose to take part in voluntary CPD. Schools organise one-day school development planning sessions and three half-day professional development sessions.

Continuing VET development has placed teacher CPD high on the agenda of State providers. To prepare for the nationwide introduction of VET subjects in 2015, VET subject teachers and university graduates expressing interest in teaching them were given the opportunity to take part in a training programme comprising content, practical pedagogy and new assessment methods ⁽⁴⁵⁾, as well as guidance to help prevent early school leaving. The intention is to have this programme accredited at EQF level 6 or 7.

With the introduction of VET bachelor programmes in 2009 at MCAST, lecturers have been awarded masters' scholarships for studies in specialist areas, including 12-week research placements abroad. They are also expected to take up a one-year post graduate certificate programme in teaching VET organised by the college with ESF funding. The programme gives them the opportunity to develop practical teaching methods based on research insights and helps them gain new vocational teaching experience locally and abroad. MCAST staffs also benefit from the vocational teacher training unit courses and

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Haaga Helia's course offer includes VET teacher programmes.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ In line with MATSEC's (2016) *Secondary education vocational subjects policy document*.

all lecturers received Business and Technology Education Council-based training covering assignment design, assessment, feedback, and verification.

Quality assurance standards govern CPD and drive efforts aimed at sustaining quality in teaching and learning at the ITS. In 2015, the institute started collaborating with Haaga Helia. A process for validating informal and non-formal prior learning was designed using European guidelines (Cedefop, 2015b) to help customise lecturing staff training programmes leading to top-up degrees in hospitality services. Upskilling staff via the degree programme in hospitality management developed by Haaga Helia puts the ITS in the position to offer bachelor degree programmes in the hospitality and tourism sector from 2017 onwards.

Following a recommendation in the 2014 strategic ESL prevention plan (Section 2.8), an institute for education was set up in 2015 to provide teachers with skills for daily work through CPD ⁽⁴⁶⁾. The institute also acts as a platform for sharing experience and promoting educational leadership. Its activities, which include developing a wide array of accredited teacher training opportunities and establishing international partnerships, are financed by ministry and EU funds.

To raise the profile of adult educators, the department for lifelong learning (DLL) of the Ministry for Education and Employment launched an EQF level 5 national diploma programme in teaching adults in 2014. The work is part of the implementation of the national lifelong learning strategy (MEDE, 2014) and was kick-started with funds for implementing the EU agenda for adult learning.

As a driver of quality and student results, teacher continuing professional development (CPD) is a strategic priority ⁽⁴⁷⁾. CPD also contributes to meeting demand for teachers, foreseen in the near future, by making the profession more attractive ⁽⁴⁸⁾. Government encourages teacher CPD through incentives such as the endeavour scholarship, Malta government undergraduate and postgraduate schemes, and *Reach high* post-doctoral scholarships ⁽⁴⁹⁾.

⁽⁴⁶⁾ Legal notice 140 of 2015 established the institute. For more information see the *Subsidiary legislation 2012/327.510* and the IFE website:
<https://instituteforeducation.gov.mt/>

⁽⁴⁷⁾ The national curriculum framework is the legal basis for teacher and trainer CPD. (MEDE, 2012, p. 44).

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Cedefop forecasts more than 4 300 job openings for teaching professionals until 2025 (Skills Panorama: explore data: *Malta*:
<http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/countries/malta#1>).

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Ministry for Education and Employment: *My scholarship*:
<http://education.gov.mt/en/education/myScholarship/Pages/default.aspx>



CHAPTER 3.

Shaping VET qualifications

3.1. [Assessing and anticipating skill needs](#)

Labour market and skills analysis in Malta has for long mostly been based on labour force survey (LFS) statistics, administrative data on employment and registered unemployment collected by Jobsplus and its predecessor, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), and ad hoc surveys. These sources help monitor the labour market situation and quantify past trends; they continue to be used to provide insight on how employment is changing.

Forward looking information on skill needs has been scarce and limited in scope. Sources offering insight into future employment needs include regular industry trends surveys among employers in the manufacturing, investment,

retail, services and construction sectors ⁽⁵⁰⁾ and the annual attractiveness survey among FDI companies and investors in Malta ⁽⁵¹⁾. These surveys and other sectoral foresight exercises tend to be qualitative, with a short-term focus and offering few possibilities to produce more specific information on skills. This limits their potential to contribute to forward-looking education and employment policies and their use by employers to plan ahead for future human resource needs ⁽⁵²⁾.

3.1.1. Expanding the evidence base

Growing concerns about shortages of skilled workers have led to increased awareness of the importance of reliable labour market and skills intelligence. Recent surveys and studies have expanded evidence on education-to-work transitions, emerging skill needs and the extent of skills and labour market mismatches and their underlying causes. Among the most important are:

- (a) the employability index 2015 (MEDE, 2015): a research tool for addressing skills gaps and increasing the labour market relevance of education and training systems. It analysed the education-to-work transition and the likelihood of graduates finding a job matched to their qualification level and field of study. Its findings inform guidance and support students in making their career choices;
- (b) the national employee skills survey (NCFHE et al., 2016) carried out in early 2016: a survey among a representative sample of employers aimed at identifying skills shortages and providing insights into trends in the Maltese labour market. It provides insights to policy-makers and feedback to education providers. Information on knowledge, skills and competences required in different sectors helps providers evaluate labour market relevance of their programmes and informs impact assessment of current reforms;
- (c) the graduate tracer study (NCFHE and MEDE, 2016): based on a 2015 survey among graduates from all academic and vocational education and training (VET) providers two years after programme completion. It is the first tracer study not limited to a single provider and covers EQF levels 1-7 programmes. The study analyses education paths, plans for future studies, labour market transitions and mobility during and after studies.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Organised by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry and PricewaterhouseCoopers. Findings are frequently used in Central Bank of Malta reports.

⁽⁵¹⁾ For the latest edition, see Ernst & Young Limited (2016). The survey includes information on recruitment problems and skill mismatch.

⁽⁵²⁾ For further information see: Eurofound: *Monthly surveys of employers*:
<http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/observatories/emcc/erm/support-instrument/monthly-surveys-of-employers>

3.1.2. Stakeholder and VET provider involvement

Despite a limited and only recently expanding evidence base on skill needs, stakeholder involvement has been strong. The Malta council for economic and social development has been an important venue for stakeholder dialogue, bringing together VET and other education providers, social partners, the public employment service and policy-makers since 2001. Employers and VET providers work together on skills issues. MCAST cooperates with sectors to ensure that its programmes are attractive to students and relevant to changing labour market needs, to address and prevent skills shortages and skills gaps. Its regular activities include:

- (a) meeting with employers and representatives from sectors and chambers;
- (b) consulting with industry to develop vocational work-based competence standards;
- (c) meeting with employers to develop programmes aimed at alleviating skills shortages;
- (d) promoting certification using EU instruments (Europass, ECVET/ECTS) to support recognition of knowledge, skills and competences.

MCAST's 2015 reorganisation into foundation, technical and university colleges (Section 2.6) has helped strengthen collaboration with employers and increase their involvement in developing VET programmes and work-based learning. The new Apprenticeships Office has supported this process with its focus on consolidating the work-based learning part of MCAST programmes.

A scientific-technical committee set up by the ITS in 2016 brings together key players in the tourism and hospitality industry, such as the Malta Hotels and Restaurants Association, the Bar Tenders Guild, tour leaders and Air Malta. They and other industry representatives are involved in developing college- and work-based programme components. The committee meets every eight weeks to ensure that the ITS full and part-time programme offer continues to meet industry needs.

3.1.3. Ongoing developments

Jobsplus has announced a review and update of its tasks, better to address current and future labour market needs in line with its changed focus of increasing employment rather than reducing unemployment ⁽⁵³⁾. One of its objectives is to make its services for employers more responsive to their needs. Discussions, consultations and labour market and skills shortages studies will inform this work. In 2016, Jobsplus set up a dedicated unit offering individual employers tailored

⁽⁵³⁾ Jobsplus: Resources: *Jobsplus strategic plan 2016-2018*.
<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=1656>

information on Jobsplus services, such as its new online matching system, training and work exposure schemes, recruitment subsidies and procedures to simplify administrative requirements.

A national skills council was set up in 2016 to improve governance of skills anticipation and coordinate work that, until now, has been fragmented across several organisations without a clearly defined and dedicated budget ⁽⁵⁴⁾. The national skills council has overall responsibility for identifying skill needs and recommending actions to address them. The council conducts research, has its own budget and works with a range of stakeholders (ministry, providers, Jobsplus, employers, experts). The 2016 national employee skills survey is seen as a basis for future systematic and periodic surveys coordinated by the council.

Malta is working towards developing a coherent system for producing and interpreting skills intelligence to understand future skill needs better. Cedefop's support in 2016 – a scoping exercise which included a field visit and a workshop in Thessaloniki – has been a basis for the next steps. Better skills intelligence will encourage evidence-based policy-making and help jobseekers and young people make informed education and career decisions; these are beneficiaries whose needs have not been sufficiently met with the skills information currently available.

3.2. Developing qualifications

3.2.1. Malta qualifications framework

The Malta qualifications framework (MQF) was launched in 2007 by the Malta Qualifications Council ⁽⁵⁵⁾. It covers initial VET (IVET) and continuing VET (CVET) and encompasses qualifications at all levels, attained through formal, non-formal and informal learning. In 2009, Malta was the first country to reference its framework to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF-EHEA) ⁽⁵⁶⁾. Legislation adopted in 2012 established its legal basis (*Legal notice 2012/294*) and made the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) responsible for all aspects of the MQF.

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Legal notice 278 of 2016 established the NSC. For more information see: <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=27839&l=1>

⁽⁵⁵⁾ Established by the *Legal notice 347* of 2005, it initiated the MQF work. It later merged with the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE) into the NCFHE. The MQF is accessible via <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx>

⁽⁵⁶⁾ It is also referenced to the transnational qualifications framework of the Small States of the Commonwealth (TQF).

Unlike qualifications frameworks in many other Member States, the MQF also covers programmes not leading to full qualifications. Accredited programmes (courses) with level rated-learning outcomes not meeting requirements of a qualification, in terms of credits offered, lead to 'awards'. The distinction was introduced to help learners and employers better understand different types of certification and their role in recruitment and career advancement.

Several updates to the referencing report since its first edition, published in 2009, evidence the MQF capacity to adapt to education and training system changes and reforms. The 2016 fourth edition is a user-friendly report, drafted following stakeholder and user consultation, and covers new developments such as reform of assessment in compulsory education and developments of the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education (see also Section 3.3) (NCFHE and MEDE, 2016). It also introduced two additional levels (A and B) for learning below level 1 to create stepping stones towards level 1 qualifications, further learning and employment ⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The MQF (Figure 17) sets the overall parameters for VET programmes leading to qualifications at level 1 to 5. It defines indicative percentages for the distribution of contact and study hours to be dedicated to eight key competences (decreasing with level), sector skills and theory (both increasing with level) and specifies principles for work-based learning ⁽⁵⁸⁾.

The MQF is seen as an important tool to promote lifelong learning and is widely used in education and training and the labour market. It is promoted through events and social and other media, and appreciated by the public and employers. Public and most private education and training providers indicate the MQF level and the number of credits in their programme offer documentation. Many learners are becoming increasingly aware of the MQF level of different learning options. People with foreign qualifications find their way to the Qualifications Recognition Information Centre to have them referenced to the MQF.

Employers use the MQF in their recruitment and career development practices and the public sector specifies the required MQF level in its vacancy notices. Government also uses the framework to steer and design policies and reforms. It is one of the criteria Jobsplus uses for issuing work permits, and MQF levels are used in incentive schemes such as scholarships and tax rebates.

⁽⁵⁷⁾ First courses to be accredited are Maltese and English, for adults with literacy problems and as foreign language. First steps were taken in 2016.

⁽⁵⁸⁾ The key competences considered follow the European framework (European Parliament and Council of the EU, 2006).

Figure 17.
VET in the Malta qualifications framework

MQF/EQF levels	Qualifications ^(a)		Distribution of contact and study hours applying to VET qualifications (EQF 1-5)		
8/8	Doctoral degree				
7/7	Master degree Post graduate diploma Post graduate certificate				
6/6	Bachelor degree				
5/5	Undergraduate diploma Undergraduate certificate	VET higher diploma foundation degree	Key competences	Sectoral skills	Theory
			10%	45%	45%
4/4	Matriculation certificate Advanced level Intermediate level	VET diploma	20%	40%	40%
3/3	General education (level 3) SEC grade 1 to 5	VET level 3	40%	30%	30%
2/2	General education (level 2) SEC grade 6-7	VET level 2	60%	20%	20%
1/1	General education (level 1) School leaving certificate	VET level 1	70%	15%	15%
B	Introductory level B ^(b)				
A	Introductory level A ^(b)				

^(a) Information about parity of esteem between general and VET qualifications is available in the 2016 referencing report.

^(b) Not yet included in legislation.

Source: NCFHE and MEDE (2016).

MQF development has been a catalyst for moving from the previously used British qualifications to national qualifications. Framework development alongside policy promoting internationalisation in education and training has contributed to a substantial increase in the number of providers licensed to offer programmes leading to level-rated qualifications and awards (from 30 in 2007 to 140 in 2016). This has necessitated the publication of a national register of all accredited and MQF level-rated programmes and all licensed public and private providers ⁽⁵⁹⁾.

⁽⁵⁹⁾ NCFHE: *List of licensed institutions and accredited courses*:
<http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx>.

3.3. Maintaining quality

MQF development has gone hand-in-hand with strengthening VET quality culture. Establishing and maintaining standards in the context of the qualifications framework falls within the remit of the Ministry for Education and Employment. ⁽⁶⁰⁾

3.3.1. VET subjects in compulsory education

Internal quality assurance (QA) of VET subjects supports teachers of these subjects in developing good practice ⁽⁶¹⁾. Internal verifiers – colleagues with knowledge and experience in teaching VET subjects and MATSEC procedures – ensure that assignments enable students to meet assessment criteria. They also check whether assessment decisions and feedback are in line with criteria. Internal QA must be documented and inaccuracies corrected before results are communicated to students.

External QA takes place twice a year: a subject expert appointed by MATSEC (external verifier) checks that assessment is accurate, consistent and fair. In addition to checks made during internal verification, external verifiers also check whether an internal verification system is in place and used correctly, and whether resources are sufficient and appropriate.

One of the three annual assignments is centralised (controlled). Though teachers mark them, the assignments are developed by the MATSEC examinations board along with grading criteria to ensure that schools adhere to set standards ⁽⁶²⁾.

3.3.2. Upper secondary and higher IVET and CVET

The NCFHE is responsible for quality assurance (QA) in VET and higher education. The national QA framework (NCFHE, 2015a) launched in 2015 was a significant step forward and the first of its kind in Europe. The framework covers upper secondary and higher VET (IVET), CVET as well as other types of further, higher and adult formal education offered by State and private providers.

The framework implements legal provisions on internal quality assurance and periodic external quality audits (Subsidiary legislation 2012/327.433) and provides

⁽⁶⁰⁾ Overall responsibility for QA lies with the ministry's directorate for quality and standards in education (DQSE). The QA department within the directorate is responsible for periodic external reviews, issuing recommendations and assistance to schools. Curriculum department officers – specialists in subjects including vocational ones – regularly visit schools to evaluate practice and support teachers.

⁽⁶¹⁾ Internal and external QA procedures are regulated by MATSEC's (2016) *Secondary education vocational subjects policy document*.

⁽⁶²⁾ The weight of the grade for the centralised assignment in the total mark is higher than the weight applied to each of the two assignments developed locally.

the conceptual context for this work. The culture of good QA practice at provider level (NCFHE, 2013) and providers' readiness to take on board a more systematic QA approach – two key findings of a 2014 scoping study – informed the approach to its development: fostering a quality culture by complementing internal QA mechanisms already in place with an external QA system adapted to national and stakeholder needs (NCFHE, 2015b).

The framework is based on European QA standards and guidelines and enriched by EQAVET and its quality criteria and indicators ⁽⁶³⁾. It provides guidance for areas which are vital for quality without prescribing how QA is to be carried out. An internal QA system, accreditation and initial and follow-up external provider and programme quality audits by NCFHE are mandatory requirements for licensing. MCAST, the ITS and the University of Malta were the first to undergo external QA audits in mid-2015 ⁽⁶⁴⁾. As self-accrediting institutions (Chapter 2) they are not subject to provider and programme accreditation.

Arrangements at provider level supporting QA include the online employer satisfaction survey by MCAST's quality assurance office and regular contacts with sectors. VET providers use EQAVET indicators to plan quality programmes, and the NCFHE encourages them to evaluate programme outcomes and to use findings for continuous improvement.

Experience so far points to the need to develop accreditation and QA parameters for work-based and digital/online learning. The QA framework needs to develop further to cater better for these learning modes.

3.4. Validation

The NCFHE is the authority for validating informal and non-formal learning (VINFL) ⁽⁶⁵⁾. It is in charge of introducing a system, providing the resources needed for the VINFL department to function efficiently, and leading the development and implementation of national occupational standards in specified areas. So far, legislation allows validation up to EQF level 5, based on occupational standards developed by sector representatives (*Legal notice 2014/194*).

⁽⁶³⁾ European quality assurance reference framework for vocational education and training (EQAVET) <http://www.eqavet.eu/gns/policy-context/european-quality-assurance-reference-framework.aspx>

⁽⁶⁴⁾ External quality audit reports are available on the NCFHE website.

⁽⁶⁵⁾ *Legal notice 2012/295* regulates validation, designated the NCFHE and outlined its responsibilities.

Validation remains limited to some sectors. A memorandum of understanding between NCFHE and ETC (now Jobsplus) made validation for childcare workers (EQF level 4) and childcare managers (EQF level 5) possible. Occupational standards have also been drawn up for the printing sector.

Formal structures for validation expanded in 2015 with the creation of sector skills units in several priority sectors: health and social care; building and construction; hair and beauty; the automotive sector; printing; educational support; and tourism and hospitality ⁽⁶⁶⁾. Another unit is planned for voluntary work. The units are in the process of drafting the occupational standards to be used for validation. The NCFHE intends to mainstream validation by setting up more sector skills units.

The approach taken by the sector skills unit for building and construction differed from what other units are doing. It aimed to address skill gaps through better understanding skill requirements and promoting health and safety at work. A 2015 white paper advocated introducing skill cards and training for all workers at least every five years ⁽⁶⁷⁾. The cards help workers develop and better use their knowledge and skills; they provide proof of completing training and/or recognition of prior learning, also in an online directory. Skill cards were launched for four pilot occupations in 2016 and it is planned to have all 110 construction trades covered within the next five years.

Sector skills units support the development of a VET quality culture by making validation possible. They are a platform for developing occupational standards, setting standards for education and training institutions, and implementing validation arrangements to provide the expanding labour market with a well-prepared workforce.

⁽⁶⁶⁾ The units develop and propose validation guidelines and mechanisms. They identify the different jobs in their respective sector, outline the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform them and map them against the MQF. The units also ensure that validation institutions comply with standards.

⁽⁶⁷⁾ Launched by government through the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) in collaboration with NCFHE, MCAST, ETC (now Jobsplus), and the Occupational Health and Safety Authority (BICC et al., 2015).



CHAPTER 4.

Promoting VET participation

4.1. Attracting learners to VET

Career weeks, fairs, information sessions and other events to attract learners in compulsory education to vocational education and training (VET) programmes are common ⁽⁶⁸⁾. Employers in both emerging and traditional sectors, along with social partners, are involved in these initiatives. Recent events respond to the 2015 VET policy, which calls for better marketing VET to ensure that labour market needs can be met (MEDE and MCAST, 2015).

The main State providers play an important role in promoting VET. Since 2012, MCAST has held an expo to showcase its programmes and qualifications and to provide prospective learners with hands-on ‘taster’ experience in trades

⁽⁶⁸⁾ An example is the Malta vocational skills week – VET as a first option (5 to 9 December 2016) which helped raise awareness and showcased advantages of choosing VET.

and information on career opportunities. Since 2001, the Malta Tourism Authority (in recent years in collaboration with the ITS) has organised the 'choice' tourism career awareness programme, which includes job shadowing opportunities.

The Ministry for Education and Employment promotes continuing VET to increase adult participation in learning. Its directorate for lifelong learning organised an outreach campaign to promote lifelong learning and basic skills development among low-skilled adults in 2014. The directorate also regularly promotes its offer of lifelong learning courses to the wider public using social media and other channels.

4.2. Incentives for learners

4.2.1. Initial VET

Maltese and EU students enrolling in full-time IVET programmes up to EQF level 6 do not pay tuition or registration fees. There are additional financial incentives for VET learners. Maltese students over 16, including those in VET programmes at MCAST or the ITS, benefit from maintenance grants ⁽⁶⁹⁾. EU and EEA citizens, as well as third country nationals, are entitled to the same rights, provided they have resident or refugee status and meet several other requirements. The maintenance grant scheme includes ⁽⁷⁰⁾:

- (a) a yearly initial grant (EUR 232.94) for purchasing textbooks and other educational materials. For students progressing to MCAST top-up degree programmes the initial grant is doubled and complemented by a one-time grant amounting to EUR 465.87;
- (b) a stipend (every four weeks between October and June) of EUR 86.85;
- (c) a supplementary grant (every four weeks between October and June) for learners facing financial difficulties and/or disability (EUR 74.50).

Other support measures include a contingency fund assisting students facing extraordinary circumstances and higher grants for single parents receiving social assistance; the grant amount increases with the qualification level achieved by the programme they take part in.

⁽⁶⁹⁾ Regulated by *Subsidiary legislation 2012/327.178*.

⁽⁷⁰⁾ Grant amounts for 2016 are reported.

Apprentices receive maintenance grants on top of the wage and half the annual statutory bonus paid by employers ⁽⁷¹⁾. Recent and continuing changes are increasing grants to make apprenticeship a more attractive learning path. Increased stipends for the summer months introduced in 2015 discourage apprentices from taking on a better paid summer job instead. The next step is topping up the grants by an amount that makes total income per hour (wage plus grants) spent learning at the workplace equal to the national minimum wage. The draft act on work-based learning and apprenticeship (in consultation end 2016) introduces the proposal to implement the grant increase (see also Section 2.4).

Maintenance grants in higher VET are used to steer learners towards programmes that educate them to become professionals in areas with labour market shortages. Students in so-called 'prescribed' and 'priority' VET bachelor degree programmes at MCAST and other providers are entitled to higher maintenance grants. The 2016 amounts for prescribed degree programmes are EUR 151.99 (stipend), EUR 698.81 (initial grant) and EUR 698.81 (one-time grant). Learners in high priority programmes receive a stipend of EUR 302.10 (MEDE, 2016a, p. 11). In 2016, prescribed and priority VET degree programmes included all those leading to a bachelor in mechanical engineering, electrical and electronics engineering and communications technology.

A students' maintenance grants board manages the maintenance grant scheme, evaluating eligibility of applications, checking student attendance to ensure compliance with regulations, and paying the entitlements ⁽⁷²⁾. Students making insufficient progress partly or fully lose their right to receive the grants.

4.2.2. Continuing VET

CVET and adult learning courses organised by the directorate for lifelong learning (DLL) are heavily subsidised by government. Participants are charged a modest tuition fee ranging from EUR 11.65 to EUR 58.23. Entry-level courses in Maltese, English, mathematics and science are offered free of charge. Migrants from EU Member States and elsewhere benefit from free English as a foreign language and Maltese as a foreign language courses.

⁽⁷¹⁾ Apprentices are legally entitled to half of the annual statutory bonus. Department for Industrial and Employment Relations: *Bonus and weekly allowances*:
<https://dier.gov.mt/en/employment-conditions/wages/Pages/Bonus-and-weekly-Allowances.aspx>

⁽⁷²⁾ Minister for Education and Employment: *Students' maintenance grants*:
<https://education.gov.mt/en/Pages/SMGBStipends/Students-Maintenance-grants.aspx>

Incentives for learners taking part in training for jobseekers and other CVET opportunities offered by Malta's public employment service Jobsplus include ⁽⁷³⁾:

- (a) free provision of training courses;
- (b) a training allowance for participants in the traineeship and *Bridging the gap* (80% of the minimum wage in both) and work exposure schemes;
- (c) a subsidy scheme to cover childcare costs (EUR 1.50 per hour of childcare services) for participants in Jobsplus training courses.

Learners paying tuition fees for courses offered by private providers, which often lead to qualifications issued by foreign accredited bodies, can benefit from scholarship schemes and grants, such as the endeavour scholarship scheme managed by the Ministry for Education and Employment. The *Get qualified* scheme run by Malta Enterprise ⁽⁷⁴⁾ grants tax deductions to cover the cost of programmes (EQF level 5 or higher) required by employers.

4.3. Incentives for employers

Employers providing work-based learning opportunities lasting at least six months in their trade or business are entitled to a tax deduction of EUR 600 for each work placement they offer and EUR 1200 for each apprentice they take on (Regulated by *Legal notice 2014/179*). While these tax incentives help cover the costs of providing work-based learning, such as materials and mentoring by managers and experienced workers, companies are not always aware of them (Cedefop, 2015a).

The training aid framework, in place between 2008 until 2015, gave the private sector grants to finance staff training, with the level of support depending on the type of training and enterprise size. Its successor, investing in skills, is planned to be launched in 2017 and has the same aim, with a view to widening access to training among the employed.

The knowledge transfer incentive introduced in 2016 helps address skill mismatch and shortages by supporting employers to train and reskill their staff ⁽⁷⁵⁾. The scheme also covers newly recruited employees. Employers in manufacturing and several other sectors (including computer programming, research and specialised design) can apply for tax credits to cover part of the costs of analysing training needs, developing training programmes, providing or outsourcing training, and wage costs for the hours their employees are in training. The share of eligible

⁽⁷³⁾ Based on information from Jobsplus website: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>

⁽⁷⁴⁾ Entity within the Ministry for the Economy, Industry and Small Business.

⁽⁷⁵⁾ Administered by Malta Enterprise (Malta Enterprise, 2016).

costs (70%) in small establishments (<50 employees) is higher than the corresponding share large establishments (250+ employees) are entitled to (50%).

Subsidy schemes make it easier for employers to provide work experience to young people and adults. Access to employment helps employers recruit jobseekers and the inactive (under some conditions including ex-apprentices) furthest from employment. The duration of the EUR 85-a-week subsidy (26, 52 or 104 weeks) depends on the target group. Employers taking on disabled persons are entitled to a weekly subsidy of EUR 125 for maximum 156 weeks. The *Bridging the gap* scheme exempts employers taking on registered unemployed persons from wages, social security contributions and sick leave benefits and gives them access to Jobsplus support.

4.4. Guidance and counselling

Annual tracer studies provide evidence on educational and career choices and pathways of students after completing compulsory education in State and non-State schools (Directorate for education services, 2015). Since 2010 more students are continuing education after leaving compulsory schooling (Section 1.4). System and institutional changes make identifying longer-term trends difficult, but comparing most recent data with the situation before 2000 suggests an increasing share of learners choose VET after compulsory education, despite academic education remaining the most popular choice. As some learners would be better able to reach their potential through VET, it is important to develop guidance services further.

4.4.1. Compulsory education

Proposals in the career guidance policy for schools underpin current practice and recent developments of career guidance services in compulsory education (Debono et al, 2007). Career guidance in State schools is offered by college career advisors, trainee career advisors, school counsellors and guidance teachers ⁽⁷⁶⁾. The service covers curricular, vocational and career guidance for students and their parents. Counsellors collaborate closely with VET institutions.

Career-related learning is provided through the personal, social and career development (PSCD) subject (MEDE and ESF, 2015). PSCD embraces the national curriculum framework principles of entitlement to quality education, recognition of diversity, and achievement. It helps learners develop learning

⁽⁷⁶⁾ The University of Malta offers programmes for career guidance professionals, such as the diploma programme in lifelong career guidance and development.

skills, emotional literacy, self-confidence, self-worth and self-esteem to equip them with the knowledge, understanding, skills and attitudes needed to live healthy, safe, productive, and responsible lives.

Since 2014, careers education has become more important. The PSCD strand on career exploration and management aims at helping learners manage their learning and career paths beyond school. PSCD has been increased from one to two hours per week. 15-year-olds take part in transition programmes offering one week hands-on experience in industry. Together with final year schoolmates, they also benefit from orientation visits to workplaces and VET colleges.

4.4.2. VET providers and Jobsplus

Support provided by the students' services department at MCAST includes career guidance, personal counselling and learning support. There is also an information service that provides students with information about the training programmes offered by the College's institutes as well as the support services available both prior to enrolment and during their studies. Similar services are in place at the ITS.

Jobsplus guidance services encourage jobseekers (including the employed) to develop their skills further through training and/or work experience in line with labour market needs. Services include career information, advice, skills assessment and mentoring. With the new registration system (2016) Jobsplus has placed more emphasis on career guidance and individualised its services through profiling, personal employment advisors, and individual action plans. Support for individuals with a job searching for alternative employment includes discussion on suitable career paths and a career test to personalise career plans and identify gaps in training and/or skills development that need to be addressed prior to pursuing the chosen career path.

4.4.3. Towards a national guidance service

A recently established committee works on implementing the 2007 career guidance policy for schools. Plans are under way to set up a national lifelong guidance service responsible for sustaining quality services at all levels of education. Envisaged future developments include measures to widen access to guidance services measures (online portal) and to streamline provision across education and employment sectors. Besides complementing, supporting and integrating existing services, the national career guidance service will increase the interaction between education, industry and other stakeholders. The intention is to move from guidance services with a supply focus to a demand-led system; this will cater better to those in need of career information or advice on career-related information.



CHAPTER 5.

The way forward: reforming lower secondary education to tap the potential of VET

5.1. Introduction

Alongside recent strategic initiatives, policies and measures in vocational education and training (VET), lifelong learning, and active ageing, rethinking lower secondary (compulsory) education is a key policy response to tackling skills challenges in the coming years. Expanding VET and applied learning routes, widening access to them and placing them on a par with the traditional academic learning pathway and customising delivery is seen as the way to help more people achieve a compulsory education qualification, avoid early leaving, raise attainment levels and give more people progression opportunities to VET and higher education programmes.

5.2. Present system challenges

In today's lower secondary education system in Malta final standardised assessment defines the purpose of learning and drives teaching ⁽⁷⁷⁾. From age 10 onwards, students are set in different learning levels or tracks for core subjects (Maltese, English and mathematics) depending on their results in national (standardised) examinations. The Ministry for Education and Employment recognises the need for change. Practitioners consider the syllabi they are required to use overly restrictive, feel pressured in having to cover them by the end of the school year, and experience a lack of leeway in investing energy and time to engage all students in meaningful learning.

Several recently introduced alternative and remedial learning programmes in middle and lower secondary schools cater for students who face difficulties in the mainstream curriculum and/or become disengaged. These include the *Alternative learning programme* for 15-year-olds, the *Core curriculum programme* and the *Education hub* for students with behavioural difficulties. In the current single structure, with quality and standards mostly defined using standardised benchmarks, these alternative learning programmes lead to EQF level 2, at best, and in some cases do not even lead to a level-rated qualification.

Mainstreaming vocational subjects at EQF levels 2 and 3 alongside traditional subjects leading to EQF level 3 in lower secondary education (Chapter 2) also opened up alternative learning pathways.

Despite these new learning options, the aims and objectives of lower secondary education remain more conducive to academically oriented education, dominant in the current system. The system has not yet sufficiently incorporated vocational training and applied learning and different assessment modes; as a result it cannot tap the potential of all learners. 'One-size' does not 'fit-all' but marginalises students who fail the mainstream curriculum, leading them into dead-ends and compromising their personal development and employability.

5.3. System reform: building blocks and features

In the *Framework for the education strategy for Malta, 2014-24*, the Ministry for Education and Employment proposed the building blocks for reforming lower secondary education and outlined the following aims:

⁽⁷⁷⁾ Lower secondary education in Malta (locally called secondary education) covers the last three years of compulsory schooling (up to age 16) in senior secondary schools. For more information see Chapter 2.

- (a) 'reducing gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools, decreasing the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence, and increasing student achievement;
- (b) supporting educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socioeconomic status, by reducing the relatively high incidence of early school leavers;
- (c) increasing participation in lifelong learning and adult learning;
- (d) raising levels of student retention and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training' (MEDE, 2014b, p. 5).

The reform *My journey: achieving through different paths* is inspired by the strategy. It was launched late 2016 and will be implemented in 2019 (MEDE, 2016b). It builds on the 2014 *Education for all* audit report ⁽⁷⁸⁾, which concluded that stronger focus on individual learning needs and more support for schools and their staff is needed to make education more inclusive. The reform incorporates the philosophy of values-based education outlined in the *Respect for all framework* (MEDE, 2014d) and reflects Unesco's four pillars of education: learning to know, learning to do, learning to be, and learning to live together.

My journey builds on the current set-up of the final three years of compulsory education system by retaining key competences and the traditional academic learning programme. It differs from the current system by providing alternative routes and learning methods tailored to individual learning needs; this makes the system equitable, inclusive and comprehensive (Table 4). Introducing equitable learning programmes, the reform enables dedicating more quality time to deep learning while increasing learning opportunities, eliminating dead ends and easing labour market entry. This implies a transition from:

- (a) prescribed content-based syllabuses to learning based on achieving outcomes;
- (b) an emphasis on assessment of learning to assessment as learning;
- (c) 'teaching to the test' to student-centred teaching based on enquiry-based learning, innovative pedagogies (such as blended learning) and assessment aimed at acknowledging different forms of knowledge and skills.

To help teachers prepare, initial teacher training and continuing professional development (CPD) are being updated. National and international cooperation to design new programmes continues and steps have been taken to tailor initial training and CPD better to what teachers need to support learners in their

⁽⁷⁸⁾ European agency for special needs and inclusive education, 2014.

classrooms (Chapter 2). This is supported by initiatives targeting infrastructure, resources and teachers' working conditions, and by setting up a national career service and a new regulatory authority.

Table 4.
Current and envisaged lower secondary education system

	Current	Proposed
Principle	Academic education as mainstream	Academic vocational and applied learning programmes with parity of esteem
Vocational subjects	At EQF levels 2-3 for high achievers in academic subjects	Leading up to EQF level 3 available for all students
Applied learning	For low achievers leading to EQF level 1	Available for all learners leading up to EQF level 3
Teaching/learning	Prescriptive syllabi and summative testing	Learning outcomes/learning the right skills
Assessment	High stakes national (standardised) exams	A variety of assessments modes
Progression	Dead ends in alternative/applied learning	Flexible progression routes for all learners
Schools	With a within-the-school focus	Partner with education and training providers and industry
Class size	Standardised	Reflecting programme type and learner needs
Teacher training	Focus on general academic education	For all academic, vocational and applied learning
Guidance	Promoting academic route and professions	Promoting progression; focus on needs
School facilities	Traditional classrooms for academic subjects	Tailored to different forms of learning

Source: MEDE, 2016b.

5.4. Equitable learning programmes

Equitable learning programmes have parity of esteem and aim to help learners with different capacities achieve up to an EQF level 3 qualification. They fall under two streams: transitional and qualification. The transitional stream prepares students to further their studies after secondary schooling in academic and vocational institutions; the qualification stream offers students employability skills to enter and be active in employment, but does not close opportunities to progress further in higher VET. Three routes cater to learners with diverse needs, capacities and preferences:

- (a) general academic learning programmes fall under the transitional stream, aiming to prepare students to further their studies in in general programmes at upper secondary schools and VET programmes;
- (b) applied learning programmes provide practical hands-on learning in a dynamic and progressive learning environment. These fall under the qualification stream, which prepares students for work while also offering them opportunities to pursue programmes at EQF levels 1-3 and progression to EQF level 4 (and possibly higher) level programmes;
- (c) vocational learning programmes combine general education with learning basic technical knowledge and skills to meet sectoral skill needs. They fall under both transitional and the qualification streams and allow students to progress to upper-secondary general and VET programmes or employment.

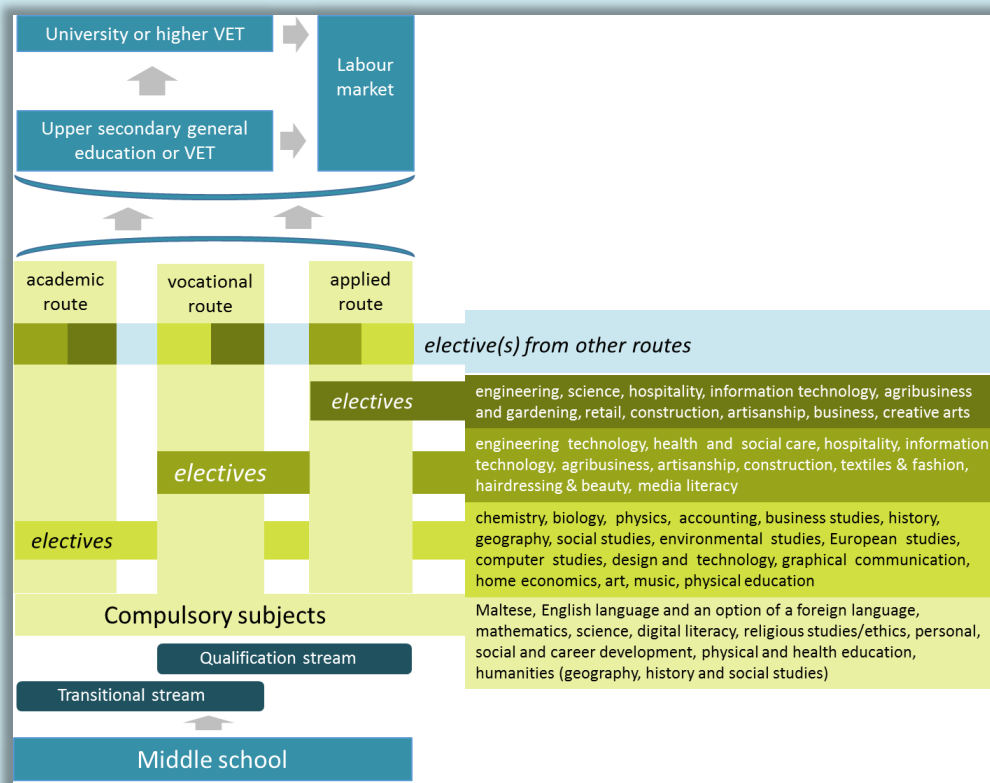
All programmes include compulsory and elective subjects. Compulsory subjects (key competences with a focus on their functionality) will be offered to all students up to EQF level 3. As per current practice, at the end of middle school at age 14, students will have the opportunity to select electives from academic and vocational subjects. The key difference with the current system is all learners will have a wider choice of vocational subjects and additional options, with the introduction of applied learning subjects. Learners will be able to mix and match, choosing electives from either a single route or several. All compulsory and elective subjects lead up to EQF level 3. Currently, there is no parity of esteem between traditional/academic mainstream and alternative learning programmes for low-performing students.

Alongside the three routes, Figure 18 gives a tentative image of the options available to future learners based on the current situation. For academic subjects, they include those currently on offer and others being considered in the current system. Vocational subjects include those mainstreamed in 2015/16 and those listed in the 2014 learning outcomes framework ⁽⁷⁹⁾. The applied subjects listed reflect the subjects currently taught in the alternative learning programme and other programmes for low-performing students.

It should be pointed out that this gives a rough impression of possible future options for learners in the reformed compulsory education system. New subjects could be added during the reform process or existing ones adapted, meaning that what will finally be on offer might be different.

⁽⁷⁹⁾ More information is available on: <http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/>

Figure 18.
Streams, routes and indicative subjects in future compulsory education



Source: MEDE, 2016b.

5.5. Conclusion

The new equitable quality system for lower secondary education creates a legacy of the past, adapts to the present and tries to anticipate future challenges and opportunities in a globalised world. It prepares compulsory education for the 21st century by strengthening links with the labour market, but also with the world beyond the classroom by providing the skills needed for meaningful engagement in society, communities and democratic life. Inclusive and comprehensive equitable quality learning programmes are the basis for compulsory education, driven by the values of inclusion, social justice, equity and diversity, and the tools to achieve the targets of the *Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24* (MEDE, 2014b).

The PISA 2015 findings signal some positive and encouraging trends, but confirm the need for the planned reform. While more work is needed to analyse them in more detail and reflect on their implications, they signal opportunities to

improve attainment in mathematics, science and reading, areas where Malta scores lower than many other Member States (PISA National Centre, 2016).

The finding that young students in Malta from disadvantaged backgrounds are less likely to beat the odds and become top performers compared to their counterparts in other countries shows how important the upcoming reform is; not only for progress, growth and prosperity, but primarily to give young people more opportunities. It is key to develop VET and applied learning in compulsory education so that they can become effective stepping stones to skills, qualifications, progression opportunities and a good and rewarding life.

List of abbreviations

CPD	continuing professional development
CVET	continuing vocational education and training
DLL	Directorate for lifelong learning
DLL&ESL	Directorate for lifelong learning and early school leavers
ECTS	European credit transfer system
ECVET	European credit system for vocational education and training
EQAVET	European quality assurance in VET
EQF	European qualifications framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ESL	early school leaving (or early leaving from education and training)
ETC	Employment and Training Corporation
GDP	gross domestic product
ICT	information and communications technology
ISCED	international standard classification of education
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
IVET	initial vocational education and training
Jobsplus	Malta's public employment service
LFS	labour force survey
MATSEC	matriculation and secondary education certificate
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
MQF	Malta qualifications framework
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NEET	not in education, employment or training
NSO	National Statistics Office
PSCD	personal, social and career development
SEC	secondary education certificate
VET	vocational education and training

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IFE: Institute for Education

<https://instituteforeducation.gov.mt/>

Investing in your future: *projects: private sector:*

<https://investinginyourfuture.gov.mt/projects/private-sector-16842760/>

ITS: Institute of Tourism Studies

<http://www.its.edu.mt/>

Jobsplus: *full course list:*

<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/courses/all-course-list>

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<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/fileprovider.aspx?fileId=1656>

Learning outcome framework:

<http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/>

MCAST: Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology

<http://www.mcast.edu.mt/>

Minister for Education and Employment: *Students' maintenance grants:*

<https://education.gov.mt/en/Pages/SMGBStipends/Students-Maintenance-grants.aspx>

Ministry for Education and Employment: *My scholarship:*

<http://education.gov.mt/en/education/myScholarship/Pages/default.aspx>

Ministry of Social Dialogue: *Bringing education into the 21st century:*

https://socialdialogue.gov.mt/en/Public_Consultations/MEDE/Pages/Consultations/BringingEducationintothe21stcentury.aspx

MQF: Malta qualifications framework

<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx>

NCFHE: *About us:*

<http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/aboutus/Pages/default.aspx>

NCFHE: *List of licensed institutions and accredited courses:*

<http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx>

Skills Panorama: Explore data: *Malta:*

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Vocational education and training in Malta

Short description

Unlike many other EU Member States, unemployment in Malta is not a major labour market problem. Its dynamic economy developed fast and withstood the crisis well. New sectors are emerging and employment has been growing. In a context of low educational attainment, high early leaving and an ageing population, this has led to skills shortages in several key sectors of the economy. This first short description on VET in Malta aims to contribute to better understanding of the system and recent developments. It analyses trends, contextualises policy responses and highlights areas of recent progress. The report paints a picture of an expanding and dynamically renewing VET system shaped by reforms that have been at the heart of Malta's response to social and economic challenges.

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