

European Inventory on NQF 2012

MALTA

Introduction

Malta has been putting its comprehensive national qualifications framework for lifelong learning (Malta qualifications framework, MQF) in place since June 2007. It encompasses qualifications and awards at all levels, provided through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Important developments took place in 2012 with amendments to the Education Act, which established the legal basis for the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), replacing the Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education. Three legal notices were published: on quality assurance and licensing of further and higher education institutions and programmes; on validation of informal and non-formal learning; and on strengthening the legal basis of the MQF for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards (¹).

Main policy objectives

The MQF addresses the following issues:

- transparency and understanding of qualifications;
- valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- consistency and coherence in relating to different qualifications frameworks in European and international cooperation;
- parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways, including vocational and professional degrees and academic study programmes;
- lifelong learning, access and progression, and mobility;
- the shift towards learning outcomes-based qualifications;
- a credit structure and units as building blocks of qualifications;
- the concept of mutual trust through quality assurance mechanisms that cut across all levels of the framework.

(¹) See Legal Notice 294. Malta Ministry of Education and Labour. Education Act. <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=23719&l=1> [accessed 5.12.2012].

The MQF is seen as an important tool to put lifelong learning and adult learning opportunities into practice. Adult participation in lifelong learning is modest at 5.7% in 2010, below the EU average (9.1% in 2010). The other policy challenge is a high rate of early school leavers, which accounted for 36.9% in 2010 (European Commission, 2011, pp. 100-105) ⁽²⁾.

Stakeholder involvement and framework implementation

A wide range of stakeholders has been involved with the MQF. The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) initiated the work following Legal Notice 347 of 2005, in cooperation with all stakeholders including the National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE).

Following amendments to the Education Act in 2012, the MQC and the National Commission for Higher Education have been merged into a new body – the National Commission for Further and Higher Education – which decides on the inclusion of qualifications in the framework. This new agency provides strategic policies for further and higher education, promotes and maintains the MQF, accredits and licenses all further (post-secondary) and higher education institutions and programmes and assists training providers in designing qualifications, assessment and certification.

Qualifications included in the MQF should satisfy the following conditions:

- be issued by nationally accredited institutions;
- be based on learning outcomes;
- be internally and externally quality assured;
- be based on workload composed of identified credit value;
- be awarded on the successful completion of a formal assessment procedures ⁽³⁾.

The MQF register of regulated qualifications was launched in September 2012 and is being steadily constructed ⁽⁴⁾.

Level descriptors and use of learning outcomes

The Maltese NQF has eight learning outcomes based qualification levels. Each level descriptor is defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competence. The descriptors highlight specific attributes such as communications skills, judgemental skills and learning skills. The level descriptors reflect complexity, volume and the level of learning expected for the particular qualification.

⁽²⁾ *Analysis of the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020): country analysis.* http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/doc/joint11/wp2_en.pdf [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁽³⁾ See Legal Notice 294.

⁽⁴⁾ The register has been placed online at www.mqc.gov.mt [accessed 5.12.2012].

Progression within the MQF is recorded in terms of:

- knowledge and understanding;
- applying knowledge and understanding;
- communication skills;
- judgemental skills;
- learning skills;
- autonomy and responsibility.

Strengthening the learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to reforms across education and training in Malta and has been applied across qualifications and levels in recent years. One of the tasks of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education is to introduce national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and to ensure that these are systematically implemented and used.

For general education, the national minimum curriculum defines learning outcomes as educational objectives that enable learners to acquire knowledge, skills and attitudes. The school leaving certificate was redesigned following a series of consultation meetings between the Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the MQC to include informal and non-formal learning as well as the individual's personal qualities. Covering the first two levels of the MQF, this initiative is intended to instil a culture of acknowledging learning achievements irrespective of the context within which the learning process occurs, from the early stages of education.

The MQF is intended to ensure that the contents of VET curricula are led by key competences and learning outcomes based on feedback from industry. Development of occupational standards and sector skills units is work in progress.

Links to other instruments and policies

Improving lifelong learning policies and practices is the guiding principle underpinning development of the MQF.

Recognition of informal and non-formal learning (prior learning) is an important part of the MQF for lifelong learning. The MQC published a series of working documents entitled *Valuing all learning*, in 2008. Volume four of these documents acknowledges the country's legislative gap in validating non-formal and informal learning and states that legislation is the first step required to take forward validation in Malta. Following consultation with the general public, the legal framework for validation is now in place ⁽⁵⁾.

The MQF also accommodates credits as building blocks of qualifications. They are defined as workload for all learning activities leading to a qualification.

⁽⁵⁾ See Legal Notice 295. *Validation of non-formal and informal learning*. <http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lp&itemid=23720&l=1> [accessed 5.12.2012].

Referencing to the EQF

In 2009, Malta was the first Member State to prepare a single, joint report which references the MQF simultaneously to both the EQF and the QF-EHEA (Malta Qualifications Council and Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sport, 2009) ⁽⁶⁾. This approach has been set as an example followed by many other countries in their own referencing process. The establishment of the MQF and its subsequent referencing have led to substantial modernisation efforts. As a result, in May 2012 an updated version of the report was presented to the EQF AG.

Table **Level correspondence established between the Maltese qualifications framework (MQF) and the EQF**

MQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
EQF	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8

Important lessons and the future plans

Development of the MQF has served as a catalyst for education reform, addressing key challenges in education, training and the labour market.

Consultation on the development of the MQF and preparation of the referencing to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were interrelated processes that led to a bridging exercise between stakeholders from different subsystems of education and employment.

The referencing process stimulated further developments including, in 2010, the design of an awards policy through the setting up of a new national awards system, and introducing validation of informal and non-formal learning into compulsory secondary education ⁽⁷⁾.

Main sources of information

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education is the designated national coordination point, <http://www.mqc.gov.mt> [accessed 7.10.2012].

⁽⁶⁾ *Referencing of the Malta qualifications framework (MQF) to the European qualifications framework (EQF) and the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF/EHEA)*. <http://www.mqc.gov.mt/referencingreport?l=1> [accessed 5.12.2012].

⁽⁷⁾ The new school leaving certificate gives, for the first time, value to all formal, non-formal and informal learning activities in accordance with the guidelines, prepared by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (Ministry of Education).