



EUROPEAN INVENTORY OF NQFs 2024

MALTA

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1. Introduction

Cedefop’s work on qualifications frameworks dates back to 2003. The Centre has contributed to the conceptual development of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and has supported its further implementation, working alongside national authorities and stakeholders to introduce and develop national qualifications frameworks (NQFs). This report is part of the European inventory of NQFs, which systematically maps and analyses NQF developments in countries participating in the EQF process. The inventory is updated biennially in close cooperation with the EQF Advisory Group, the European Commission and the European Training Foundation. The report provides a detailed description of the structure of the Maltese NQF (MQF) (*Qafas Nazzjonali tal-Kwalifiki, QNK*) and its institutional arrangements. It also examines the framework’s implementation and its impact on broader policy areas, focusing on key developments since 2022.

Since 2007, Malta has been implementing the MQF, an eight-level comprehensive framework. This includes qualifications and awards at all levels acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. In 2009, MQF was referenced to the EQF and the qualifications framework of the European higher education area (QF-EHEA). In 2024, the [fifth edition](#) of the Referencing Report was released (see Chapter 8).

2. National context

2.1. Policy context

In 2023 the public expenditure on education as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) decreased compared to 2020 from 4.9% to 4.1%, below the EU-27 average, which for 2023 was 4.7% ⁽¹⁾. Also, in 2023 the percentage of tertiary education attainment (age 25–34) was 46.2%, above the EU-27 average, which for the same year was 43.1% ⁽²⁾. Participation in upper secondary vocational education and training (VET) increased in 2023 28.8% (27.6% in 2022), but it is still well below the EU average, which for 2023 was 49.1% ⁽³⁾. In 2024, the employment rate of recent VET graduates (20–34 years old) was 89.1 %, well

(1) More information at Eurostat [[gov_10a_exp](#)], accessed 16.04.2025.

(2) More information at Eurostat [[edat_ifs_9912](#)], accessed 16.04.2025. Break in time series for Malta.

(3) More information at Eurostat [[educ_uoe_enra13](#)], accessed 16.04.2025.

above the EU average (80.0 %) ⁽⁴⁾. The participation in early childhood education in 2023 was 93.2% ⁽⁵⁾, slightly less than the EU average, which was 94.6%. In 2024 the share of early leavers from education and training (aged 18–24) was 9.6%, close to the EU average which was 9.3% ⁽⁶⁾. Finally, the adult participation in learning in 2024 has increased to 18.4% (13.0% in 2022), well above than the EU average, which for 2024 was 13.3% ⁽⁷⁾.

The MQF supports many aspects of the ‘[National Strategic Action Plan for Further and Higher Education 2022-2030](#)’ by providing a clear, structured, and transparent framework for qualifications. This framework supports quality assurance, lifelong learning, relevance to industry needs, social inclusion, and international mobility, all of which are key components of the strategic plan (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). One of the strategic measures included in the ‘[National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2023-30](#)’, is ensuring quality in lifelong learning course provision through the evaluation of the courses offered by the Lifelong Learning (LL) Unit, verifying that they align with the MQF levels and update or enhance all programmes as needed to meet these standard (Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research & Innovation, 2023).

2.2. NQF legal basis

Already in the 2010s MQF was firmly integrated in the overall national qualification system, including links to relevant legislation ⁽⁸⁾ ⁽⁹⁾ and policy strategies, especially in the areas of education and employment. The [subsidiary legislation 607.01](#) provides the legislative foundation for the functioning and governance of the MQF, ensuring that qualifications in Malta are transparent, comparable, and meet both national and European standards. Furthermore, Education Act and its amendments ⁽¹⁰⁾ the subsidiary legislation on further and higher education (licensing, accreditation and quality assurance) regulations supports the MQF by ensuring educational institutions and programmes meet established licensing and accreditation standards. It enforces quality assurance practices, aligning the MQF with the EQF and QF-EHEA and promotes collaboration among stakeholders to keep the MQF relevant and responsive to the needs of education, labour, and society (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

⁽⁴⁾ More information at Eurostat [[edat_lfse_24](#)], accessed 16.04.2025.

⁽⁵⁾ More information at Eurostat [[educ_uoe_enra21](#)], accessed 16.04.2025. Low reliability for Malta.

⁽⁶⁾ More information at Eurostat [[edat_lfse_14](#)], accessed 16.04.2025.

⁽⁷⁾ More information at Eurostat [[sdg_04_60](#)], accessed 16.04.2025.

⁽⁸⁾ [Legal Notice 294 of 2012 on Malta qualifications framework for lifelong learning](#).

⁽⁹⁾ [Consolidated legislation relevant to the MQF](#).

⁽¹⁰⁾ See [Legal Notices 30 of 2021](#) and [31 of 2021](#); [Legal Notice 374 of 2021](#) and [Legal Notice 479 of 2021](#).

3. NQF objectives

The main objectives of the MQF are:

- (a) aiding transparency and understanding of qualifications nationally and internationally;
- (b) valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- (c) improving consistency both internally and with European and international qualifications frameworks;
- (d) promoting parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways, including vocational and professional degrees and academic study programmes;
- (e) lifelong learning, access and progression and mobility;
- (f) a shift towards learning-outcomes-based qualifications;
- (g) credit structure and units as qualification building blocks;
- (h) the concept of mutual trust through quality assurance mechanisms running across all levels of the framework.
- (i) Increase awareness of the MQF
- (j) Increase automatic recognition of qualifications (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022; 2024).

4. Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

4.1. NQF structure and level descriptors

The MQF has eight learning-outcomes-based qualification levels. The MQF levels are described in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, and are accompanied by a more detailed set of learning outcomes aimed at aiding the operationalisation of MQF requirements; these are defined in terms of knowledge and understanding, applying knowledge and understanding, communication skills, judgemental skills, learning skills, autonomy and responsibility, with a strong focus on key competences. There are also Introductory Levels A and B which were first introduced in the 2016 updated Referencing Report to support individuals who face educational challenges and are beyond compulsory school age. Through the updated 2024 Referencing Report it was clarified that they are not formally classified within the MQF. Being outside the MQF structure, does not reduce their importance. They play a crucial role in helping learners progress toward MQF recognised qualifications or other education and training opportunities that can improve their chances of employment (MFHEA, 2024).

4.2. NQF scope and coverage

MQF is designed to be inclusive and flexible, including general, vocational, higher education and adult education formal qualifications, and qualifications awarded through non-formal and informal learning. It currently includes microcredentials, partial qualifications, international qualifications, and modules or units of learning outcomes and qualifications.

Microcredentials are referred to as ‘awards’, a term used nationally to denote certifications achieved through programmes that do not meet the full credit requirements of a qualification at a specific MQF level. Awards can even equal 1 ECTS. Despite their shorter credit load, these awards are formally referenced to the MQF at level 1 to 7 and currently there are approximately 4 000 available awards ⁽¹¹⁾. Examples of such awards already included in the MQF are the MQF/EQF level 5 awards in payroll administration, human resources foundations, as well as level 4 and 5 awards in fashion design (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Partial qualifications are recognised within the MQF and typically take the form of exit awards. These are awarded when a learner completes part of a full qualification but does not fulfil all requirements. For example, the MQF level 5 award in communications and the media (sport management) (10 ECTS) serves as an exit award from the broader diploma in sports management (60 ECTS) (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The framework is also open to and includes international qualifications, such as those offered by the ACCA (Association of Chartered Certified Accountants), which are referenced to appropriate MQF levels based on comparability in learning outcomes and workload. Additionally, the MQF accommodates modules or units of learning outcomes, which allow for more granular recognition of learning achievements. An example includes individual modules within ACCA qualifications that are recognised independently when aligned with the MQF (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Training programmes offered by further and higher education providers are accredited based on the MQF level and corresponding level descriptors ⁽¹²⁾; the number of such levelled programmes to the MQF continue to increase as more programmes are accredited annually by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA) ⁽¹³⁾ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

⁽¹¹⁾ Internal communication with MFHEA.

⁽¹²⁾ In other words, linking their programmes to the MQF is a requirement for their accreditation.

⁽¹³⁾ In January 2023, there were 4 236 such programmes (from MQF level 1 to level 8). These data do not include programmes from self-accredited institutions.

Table 1. **Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)**

NQF level	Qualifications	EQF level
8	Doctoral degree Professional Doctorate	8
7	Master's degree Postgraduate diploma Postgraduate certificate	7
6	Bachelor's degree Bachelor's Honor	6
5	Undergraduate Higher Diploma Undergraduate diploma Undergraduate certificate VET level 5	5
4	Advance Diploma Pre-Tertiary Certificate MATSEC Matriculation certificate (Advance & Intermediate) VET level 4	4
3	Certificate MATSEC Secondary Education Certificate VET level 3	3
2	Foundation Certificate MATSEC Secondary Education Certificate VET level 2	2
1	Introductory Certificate VET level 1	1

NB: Awards (microcredentials) are not mentioned in this table.

Source: MFHEA, 2024.

4.3. Use of learning outcomes

Malta has integrated learning outcomes across its education system since 2009, ensuring consistency from early childhood to adult education. Institutions, including VET oriented must define courses based on learning outcomes, in line with national regulations. The MQF mandates that qualifications follow this approach, with accreditation granted only to those structured accordingly (Cedefop, 2024). These learning outcomes serve as a reference tool, helping to understand the levels and equivalencies of qualifications. By focusing on learning outcomes, the MQF promotes transparency, consistency, and mobility within Malta's education and training systems (see Section 7.8). It also provides a guide for describing and comparing both national and foreign qualifications (MFHEA, 2024).

In general education, the reform of the national curriculum framework has led to the development of learning outcomes for all subjects in compulsory education, promoting inclusion, diversity and citizenship. The 2016 learning outcomes framework⁽¹⁴⁾ has supported the implementation of the national curriculum framework, which started in September 2019. The learning outcomes framework is intended to lead to more curricular autonomy for colleges and schools and give them the freedom to develop programmes that fulfil the framework of knowledge, attitudes and skills-based outcomes that are considered a national education entitlement for all learners in Malta. The reform called My journey (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016) aims to change the one-size-fits-all approach in education, and to fight the marginalisation of low achievers by reducing the number of early school leavers. Since the school year 2015/2016 in lower secondary education and September 2019 in upper secondary education, the reform has allowed learners to opt for vocational subjects, in addition to the core curriculum (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024). Each attainment level in the framework comprises a list of learning outcomes, and/or grading criteria in the case of vocational subjects⁽¹⁵⁾.

In VET, Malta is developing [national occupational standards \(NOS\)](#)⁽¹⁶⁾, currently in the Health and Social Care Sectoral Skills Unit, which are aligned with the MQF, to inform VET programmes. This alignment ensures that the standards are clear, since they are described in learning outcomes, which specify the

⁽¹⁴⁾ More information at [Learning outcomes framework](#).

⁽¹⁵⁾ There are three categories of general education subjects, two categories of VET subjects and one category of entry-level subjects. More information on the [Learning outcomes framework website](#).

⁽¹⁶⁾ These standards published by the MFHEA consist of a set of job-related standards that highlight the performance expected from an individual when carrying out a specific function. They define the main jobs that people carry out, and link qualifications to the requirements of the labour market.

necessary knowledge, skills, and competences for each occupation. The MFHEA has published 108 [national occupational standards](#), based on the learning outcomes approach (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024). The MQF level descriptors are utilised in the drafting, reviewing and publishing of occupational standards in the following sectors: automotive (two occupational standards), building and construction (60 occupational standards), childcare (two occupational standards), hair and beauty (two occupational standards), health and social care (five occupational standards), hospitality and tourism (20 occupational standards), information technology (five occupational standards) and printing and digital media (twelve occupational standards). Self-accredited⁽¹⁷⁾ and licensed private VET providers, offering courses accredited by the MFHEA, use the learning outcomes approach in their course descriptions (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024).

In higher education, there are self-accredited⁽¹⁸⁾ and licensed private higher education institutions, offering courses accredited by the MFHEA. Programmes developed in higher education are being remodelled based on learning outcomes (National Commission for Further & Higher Education, 2016a).

4.4. Quality assurance arrangements

The MFHEA operates as the national quality assurance agency and is an affiliate member of the [European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education](#). In 2015, the MFHEA launched the national quality assurance framework for upper secondary and higher VET (IVET), including work-based learning (WBL) and continuing VET as well as further, higher and adult formal education⁽¹⁹⁾. The framework includes internal quality assurance and periodic external quality audits, following the European standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European higher education area and the European quality assurance in VET indicators (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024). The MQF is well embedded in the national quality assurance framework, as it has strong synergy with quality assurance standards that educational institutions must commit to in order to be accredited (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). A major aim of the framework is to enhance the implementation of the learning outcomes approach by education and training providers (National Commission for Further & Higher Education, 2016b).

⁽¹⁷⁾ The self-accredited institutions are the state VET providers, i.e. the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

⁽¹⁸⁾ The self-accredited institutions are the higher education providers, such as the University of Malta, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

⁽¹⁹⁾ More information on [quality assurance](#).

The MFHEA is revising the [national quality assurance framework](#) ⁽²⁰⁾ and has developed the ‘[External Quality Assurance Provider Accreditation Manual for Higher Education Institutions](#)’ to evaluate providers and track their progress thus enhancing education quality.

5. Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

The MFHEA ⁽²¹⁾, an independent authority part of the portfolio of the education ministry, is the EQF national coordination point (NCP) and is the authority responsible for all aspects of the MQF’s implementation ⁽²²⁾. The research and policy unit of the MFHEA is responsible for the day-to-day running of the MQF. The MFHEA also acts as the competent authority for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of providers and programmes in further and higher education.

A wide range of stakeholders was involved in developing and setting up the MQF. In the implementation of the MQF, the MFHEA cooperates with the ministry’s Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, which is responsible for quality assurance and standards in compulsory education. The MFHEA leads the development and implementation of occupational standards in cooperation with social partners, sector skills units ⁽²³⁾ and other stakeholders such as Jobsplus ⁽²⁴⁾. The MFHEA has set up a Steering Committee (developed under EQF-NCP project 2021-2023 and continued in 2024-2026), to assist in decision-making and guidance, and to support the development of the MQF. On an ad hoc basis, further involvement of stakeholders is sought mainly through surveys and the annual national colloquium. As an outward-looking framework, the MQF has enabled cooperation with stakeholders outside the country, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) Partnership. The MQF is seen to have

⁽²⁰⁾ More information on the [public consultation phase for the proposed new accreditation manual](#).

⁽²¹⁾ Up to 2021, the official title of the authority was the National Commission for Further and Higher Education.

⁽²²⁾ Following [subsidiary legislation SL 327.431](#), an MQF coordinator is appointed and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Malta Qualifications Framework (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020).

⁽²³⁾ Sector Skills Units: MFHEA along with the National Skills Council. The law is under amendment, currently at very final stages. Source: Internal communication with MFHEA.

⁽²⁴⁾ [Jobsplus](#) is Malta’s public employment service, previously known as the Employment and Training Corporation.

improved, to a certain extent, stakeholders' engagement and cooperation but more needs to be done as this remains a challenge (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020; 2022; 2024).

In preparation for the 2024 edition of the Referencing Report, an MQF Steering Committee was established in 2023 to raise awareness, provide guidance, foster collaboration, and support the effective integration of referencing standards (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6. Recognition and validation of prior learning

6.1. Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways

The MQF recognises the importance of prior learning, whether acquired formally, non-formally, or informally. This allows individuals to have their existing skills and knowledge assessed and acknowledged. The value and importance VNFIL were emphasised and reinforced in the 2024 update of the MQF referencing report (MFHEA, 2024). VNFIL and the MQF share the objective of enabling individuals to advance based on achieved learning outcomes.

There are validation arrangements for most MQF qualification types (apart from general education qualifications at levels 1 and 3 and the doctoral degree at level 8) that can lead to a partial or full qualification. Validation arrangements also can give credits/exemptions towards a qualification at levels 2 to 8 (for some qualifications at levels 2 and 3) and can give access to programmes leading to all MQF qualification. Furthermore, according to the VNFIL [regulations](#), awards (microcredentials) up to MQF level 5 can be awarded with VNFIL (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The MFHEA is responsible for establishing and managing the VNFIL system, drafting guidelines aligned with the MQF and ensuring that the learning outcomes approach is used systematically (Cedefop & ReferNet, 2024). In agreement with the sector skills units ⁽²⁵⁾, it does not implement validation itself but subcontracts other public or private entities such as Jobsplus and the Institute of Tourism Studies (Scott, 2024). The country has developed occupational standards in vocational education and currently there are 108 published occupational standards

⁽²⁵⁾ Sector skills units develop occupational standards for their relevant economic sectors; they identify the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their sectors. They receive advice from the Sector Skills Committee, which is responsible for formulating policies and procedures to govern them as well as criteria and standards for VNFIL.

in eight different sectors that are used in VNFIL (see Section 4.3) ⁽²⁶⁾. People who successfully achieve their validation assessment receive an award in their occupation, so the validation process is automatically linked to the MQF. The MFHEA has published [guidelines](#) on recognition of prior learning (RPL) and a [RPL scoring report](#) which provides insights into the practical application of RPL, featuring case studies to illustrate its impact. (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). According to the guidelines, an overarching principle of the validation system is that RPL should always involve the use of the MQF in determining the level, volume and depth of evidence (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021a).

6.2. Recognition of foreign qualifications

MQF serves as a referencing tool that helps to describe and compare both national and foreign qualifications to promote the quality and transferability of qualifications in all types of education (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). The [Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre](#) (MQRIC) is part of the MFHEA. It is responsible for recognising both local and international academic programmes using the MQF and the EQF. MQRIC also serves as Malta's official ENIC-NARIC centre, providing recognition statements for various purposes such as further studies, employment, and other official needs. Since 2016, MQRIC has seen an increase in online submissions, thanks to its automated recognition procedures (MFHEA, 2024).

Malta has not conducted any work aimed at exploring the comparability of the MQF with those of third countries. However, Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) have been signed between the Maltese government and the governments of Qatar and China to facilitate the accessibility of qualifications holders from both countries. Additionally, the MQRIC participated in the [ARENA project](#), which provided information on the educational systems of Yemen, Rwanda, Burundi, Sudan; and Palestine and the [PELIARQ project](#) which aimed to strengthen connections and understanding between European higher education institutions and those in Jordan, Lebanon, and Syria ⁽²⁷⁾ (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

6.3. Promoting lifelong learning

Accredited adult education courses levelled to the MQF enable adults to engage in lifelong learning and progress to higher MQF levels. One of the main aims of VNFIL is to increase lifelong learning and employability, as the awards obtained through VNFIL help candidates develop their careers or further their studies. The increased numbers of national occupational standards and of certificates acquired

⁽²⁶⁾ More information about [VNFIL](#).

⁽²⁷⁾ Internal communication with MFHEA.

through VNFIL indicate promising developments in this area. Adult learners in Malta can choose from a wide array of vocational and academic subjects designed for personal growth. The [Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning, and Employability](#) offers various lifelong learning courses accredited by the MFHEA. These courses span between MQF levels 1 to 3 and can lead to a qualification such as the award in ‘Introduction to Human Resource Management’ at MQF level 2 (MFHEA, 2024).

7. NQF implementation and impact

7.1. Stage of implementation

The MQF is at operational stage, as it is a permanent and visible feature of education and training. The MQF also supports the system’s reform and renewal.

7.2. Procedures for including qualifications in the NQF

The process of including qualifications in the MQF is structured around ensuring that all qualifications meet established standards of quality, relevance, and consistency with national and European expectations. This process is overseen by the MFHEA, which serves as the regulatory body responsible for accrediting education programmes and referencing them to the appropriate MQF levels.

In essence, for qualifications and awards to be accredited and included in the MQF, they must meet the following criteria (Ministry for Education & Employment, 2012):

- (a) be issued by nationally accredited institutions;
- (b) be based on learning outcomes;
- (c) undergo internal and external quality assurance;
- (d) be based on a workload with a specified credit value;
- (e) be awarded upon successful completion of formal assessment procedures.

More specifically, the core of the procedure involves programme accreditation. Education institutions must submit their programmes for evaluation. These programmes are then assessed against the MQF level descriptors to determine their alignment in terms of knowledge, skills, and competences. The levelling is guided by a learning outcomes-based approach, which ensures that the focus remains on what learners are expected to achieve by the end of the programme. These qualifications must demonstrate comprehensive alignment with the level descriptors, covering cognitive, practical, and interpersonal competences. Programmes must also specify the total learning workload, which is measured

using the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), where one credit is equivalent to 25 hours of total learning. Full qualifications, such as degrees, diplomas, or certificates, must meet a minimum threshold of ECTS credits appropriate for their level. For example, a bachelor's degree at MQF level 6 requires at least 180 ECTS.

Quality assurance plays a central role in this process. All programmes undergo an external quality assurance review by independent experts to confirm that they meet the standards outlined in the National Quality Assurance Framework. Only after successfully passing this review does the MFHEA formally accredit the programme and assign it an MQF level.

On the other hand, shorter programmes that do not meet the minimum credit requirement to be considered full qualifications are classified as awards. While these awards are assigned to an MQF level based on their learning outcomes, they are distinguished from full qualifications by their reduced credit load. Despite their smaller scale, awards are still subject to the same rigorous quality assurance and referencing processes as full qualifications (MFHEA, 2024).

7.3. Indicating EQF/NQF levels

In Malta, most qualifications listed in the MQF include a clear indication of the MQF level across all relevant documentation—namely certificates or diplomas, Europass certificate supplements and diploma supplements. This full consistency applies to qualifications from MQF level 5 upwards, including doctoral, master's, bachelor's, and various undergraduate diplomas and certificates, as well as VET diplomas at levels 1 to 4. For general education qualifications at levels 1 to 3, the inclusion of MQF level information is less consistent. For example, SEC grades at level 2 and 3 show the MQF level on certificates but it is not available in the Diploma Supplement. At level 1, general education may only show the MQF level on some certificates and not in other standard documentation.

The EQF levels are not shown on qualification certificates or diplomas. However, they are consistently indicated on the Europass certificate supplement and diploma supplements. General education qualifications at EQF levels 1 to 3 do not display the EQF level in any format (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

7.4. NQF dissemination

Europass/Euroguidance contact points cooperate and coordinate with the MFHEA. Regular meetings take place, and the three networks collaborate during dissemination events and on developing promotion materials. Through the MQRIC, the MFHEA has established an effective network with employers to promote use of the MQF. Other methods of informing potential users about the framework

include social media and the [MFHEA website](#), which is continuously updated. Dissemination targeting the public also takes place through information posters; leaflets/booklets; a [2024 video explaining the MQF](#), its level descriptors, the use of credits and the difference between qualifications and awards; an [interactive presentation](#) of the MQF; a [glossary of terms](#) commonly used in the context of further and higher education; and the Malta qualifications database (see Section 7.5). The creation of an MQF logo, which was launched in August 2020, has given the framework more visibility. Guidelines on RPL (see Section 6.1) target providers (European Commission & Cedefop, 2020; 2022; 2024). Furthermore, the MQF Steering Committee that was formed to oversee the development and dissemination of the fifth edition of the Referencing Report (see Chapter 5) has as a main objective to foster understanding of the qualifications for broad application (MFHEA, 2024).

7.5. Qualifications databases and registers

The [Malta qualifications database](#) has been developed by the MFHEA, aiming to provide the public, education institutions, and other stakeholders at national and international levels with transparent and up-to-date information on licensed providers and accredited programmes. The database features an advanced search option that includes filters for ‘Qualification Status’ and ‘Licence Status’. Additionally, a ‘Licensed Institution’ button allows users to view specific programmes by selecting the licensed institution, directing them to a search screen. The search results are visually distinguished by coloured labels: ‘Homegrown-Qualification’ (red), ‘Homegrown-Award’ (orange), ‘Foreign’ (blue), and ‘Other’ (purple), making it easier to identify the type of qualification (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024). The database includes all MQF qualifications and awards (8 020 in total in May 2025), while it is regularly updated with the new courses accredited. It is connected to the Europass platform (via the qualifications dataset register). Detailed information, in English, on all elements mentioned in the 2017 EQF recommendation is available, including MQF/EQF level, field of study, description of each qualification, awarding body, internal and external quality assurance procedures, and relevant links. Learning outcomes descriptions included in the database should follow a specific structure: action verb, object and context (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

7.6. Awareness and use of the NQF

In February 2021, the MQF impact report was published. The report showed a high level of awareness of the MQF across most groups: 83% of all respondents said that they were moderately/very aware of the framework, with 54% saying that they were ‘very aware’. However, awareness among learners is relatively low, as 42.3%

said that they were vaguely aware or had never heard of it and only 23.5% said that they were very aware. On the contrary, educators and government agencies exhibited high levels of awareness, since 73.6% and 71.2%, respectively, replied that they were 'very aware' of the MQF.

Regarding the promotion of the MQF, again educators (49%) and those working in government agencies (40%) are those most likely to have seen information regularly or frequently; 65% of learners said that they had never or only rarely seen any information. Only a minority of respondents considered that the MQF was adequately promoted. (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b).

Around half of the 225 educators who responded to the survey reported using the MQF to support various aspects of education design and development. They indicated that the MQF helped them ensure learners were studying at the appropriate level, design more effective curricula and qualifications, assign credit and level ratings, achieve programme accreditation, and maintain quality standards. Also, public sector employers are required to state qualification requirements in terms of MQF levels when advertising jobs, with the aim of encouraging a wider and more diverse pool of applicants. Other employers are also encouraged to adopt this approach. The impact report found that 42% of employers and 41% of government agency respondents had used the MQF in their recruitment processes (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b).

The MQF level is indicated in entry requirements for each training programme (as this is expected by the quality assurance standards), in prospectuses of training providers and on qualifications. This means that international and Maltese learners have access to MQF-related information when deciding on their studies or when they wish to go to study abroad. Learners often request recognition to ensure that their academic courses are levelled to MQF. There has also been a steady increase in the number of education institutions interested in getting their programmes accredited and thus levelled to the MQF. Guidance practices and policies, including guidance related to international students, have also incorporated the MQF (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022). Jobsplus also uses the MQF as its main criterion for issuing work permits ⁽²⁸⁾, and MQF levels are used in incentive schemes such as scholarships and tax rebates (Cedefop, 2019).

In further and higher education, for a programme to be accredited it must be levelled to the MQF. This means that the MQF and the level descriptors are the basis on which study programmes are developed. The MQF level descriptors are also used in developing occupational standards (European Commission &

⁽²⁸⁾ The majority of non-EU nationals working in Malta use a single permit issued by Identity Malta. Jobsplus is responsible only for conducting the labour market check.

Cedefop, 2022). The MQF is well embedded in the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education institutions (see Section 4.4). Furthermore, VNFIL awards are levelled to the MQF (see Section 6.1).

7.7. Monitoring and evaluating the NQF

In 2021, the MFHEA in collaboration with the SCQF Partnership published the first in-depth review of the MQF (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b). The review examined aspects such as end user visibility and awareness among key stakeholders, the impact of the MQF on teaching and learning, curriculum design, learners' international mobility to and from Malta, and progression between levels and different education pathways. It covered a wide range of stakeholders through an online survey, focus groups and interviews. Overall, the findings revealed strong support for the MQF, particularly among educators and government agency staff. While employers and learners also recognised its value, their overall satisfaction levels were somewhat lower. The MQF is generally seen as fit for purpose and flexible enough to accommodate various types of qualifications and serve different stakeholders. However, this flexibility is not always well understood by the broader Maltese community, highlighting the need for more effective communication strategies (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b).

7.8. Impact of the NQF

The MQF has had a notable impact on enhancing the transparency and comparability of qualifications, both nationally and internationally. This is evident in the growing number of educational institutions, seeking to have their programmes accredited and aligned with an MQF level, and individuals seeking recognitions to ensure their programmes are aligned with an MQF level. Evidence of this trend is reflected in annual reports from the MFHEA (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

The MQF impact review showed that its impact on education design and development is positive. More than 70 % of the educators who participated in the survey responded that the MQF had some positive or a very positive impact on them or their organisation in ensuring their learners are studying at the appropriate level, increasing the quality of qualifications/teaching, improving qualification and curriculum design, assigning credits, and levelling qualifications to MQF and accrediting them. A challenge was the difficulty in applying the MQF in vocational training, as some respondents mentioned that the wording of level descriptors fits higher education better and cannot fully capture the range of vocational learning, making it difficult for employers to understand learning outcomes that learners have achieved (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b).

Government agency staff generally viewed the MQF as having a positive influence on recruitment, with 41.1% reporting some positive impact and 15.5% noting a very positive impact on both the quality of the recruitment process and the number of applications. In contrast, employer responses were more mixed. While 48% acknowledged some positive impact on recruitment processes, nearly 30% felt the MQF had no impact on recruitment and 5 out of 39 employers, that took part in the survey, felt the impact on applications had been negative or very negative. Improved support for building the capacity of educators and employers is needed to enable them to get a deeper understanding of the MQF and use it better (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b). An important finding of the review is that approximately 50% of educators perceived that the MQF has some or very positive impact on their cooperation with employers and those working in government agencies, and vice versa. This is an indication that the MQF offers a common language (which can be further improved) to ease cooperation between education and the labour market (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b).

Approximately 50% of learners mentioned that the MQF had some positive or a very positive impact in motivating them to continue studying or helping them to apply for a job, better plan their career, prepare their CV and apply for courses. The review also revealed the potential and complexity of applying the framework in VNFIL. Some respondents even highlighted that the increased use of the MQF in recruitment will have a negative impact on holders of qualifications that pre-date the MQF and on those who gained their skills and competences through informal learning (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b). Nevertheless, the MQF has contributed to laying a firm foundation for the implementation of VNFIL (see Section 6.1).

There are indications that the MQF has promoted parity of esteem between different types of education, training and qualifications, as it is used for all types of qualifications and all education pathways. This has increased trust among different sectors and allows learners to move from one pathway to another more easily (European Commission & Cedefop, 2022).

8. Referencing to the EQF

The MQF was referenced to the EQF and the QF-EHEA in a combined report in 2009. Updates were published in 2010, 2012, 2016 and 2024. The latest edition of the Referencing Report aims to make the Maltese education system more accessible and understandable for educational institutions, learners, employers, and the international community. It also serves as a detailed compilation of knowledge and expertise contributed by numerous individuals and organisations

within Malta's dynamic Further and Higher Education (FHE) sector. This publication underscores the achievements of the MQF, highlighting its alignment with the EQF and the QF-EHEA. Furthermore, it updates the educational framework to reflect recent changes, aiming to improve the clarity and comparability of qualifications (MFHEA, 2024).

9. Reflections and plans

The MQF is operational and an important element of the national education, training and qualifications system. It improves the transparency and comparability of qualifications, supports reform and renewal, and addresses key challenges in education, training and the labour market.

A major success factor is that policies promoting the implementation of the MQF, lifelong learning, VNFIL and quality assurance in education and training are strongly consistent with each other. Thus, the MQF has been an important tool in implementing policies in these areas. It has also contributed to increasing parity of esteem and permeability between VET and general or academic education. The MQF has supported the shift towards learning outcomes, while in further and higher education only programmes levelled to the MQF can be accredited, making the framework and its level descriptors the basis for developing study programmes and occupational standards.

The MQF impact review showed an overall high level of awareness of the MQF. Increasing awareness on the MQF is a key priority, included in Malta's National Strategic Action Plan for Further and Higher Education 2022-30 (MFHEA, 2022). However, only a minority of respondents considered that the MQF is adequately promoted. Furthermore, although MQF levels are indicated in entry requirements for each training programme, in prospectuses of training providers and on qualifications, the review showed that learners are less aware of the framework than other stakeholders are. This may indicate that different communication tools should be used. The Malta qualifications database is expected to further raise awareness of the MQF and provide stakeholders with detailed and up-to-date information on MQF qualifications and awards.

The review showed that educators consider that the MQF has, overall, a positive impact on increasing the quality of qualifications/teaching and improving the design of qualifications and curricula. Approximately one out of two learners mentioned that the MQF had a positive impact on them, for instance in developing their CVs and choosing a course. Although improved support for building the capacity of educators and employers is needed to enable them to get a deeper understanding of the MQF and use it better, there are indications that the MQF has

contributed to fostering cooperation between them (MFHEA & SCQF Partnership, 2021b).

Despite the improvements brought about by the development and introduction of the MQF, there are still issues to be addressed. The main future challenges lie with the further promotion of the MQF and dealing adequately with VNFIL, microcredentials/awards, WBL and digital education. Other challenges include the limited resources and support, which hinder its development and promotion, low stakeholder engagement and weak integration with labour market needs (European Commission & Cedefop, 2024).

Acronyms

EQF	European qualifications framework
MFHEA	Malta Further and Higher Education Authority
MQF	Malta qualifications framework
NQF	national qualifications framework
QRIC	Qualifications and Recognition Information Centre
RPL	recognition of prior learning
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning
WBL	work-based learning

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