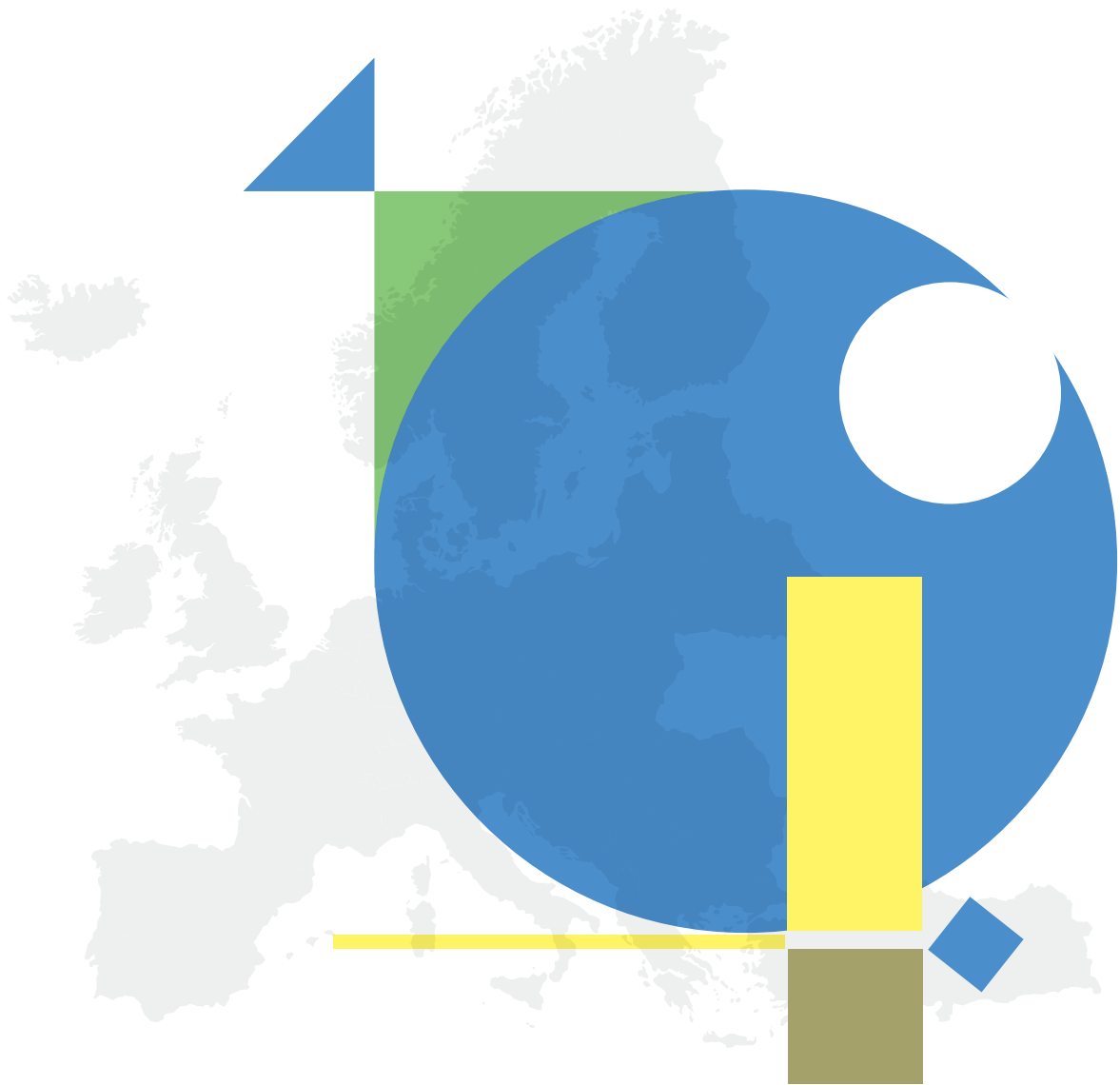




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EUROPEAN INVENTORY OF NQFs 2020

MALTA

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MALTA

European inventory of NQFs 2020

Introduction and context

Malta has been reforming its education, training and qualification systems. The Malta qualifications framework (MQF) has assisted in making the Maltese qualifications system easier to understand and review, and more transparent at national and international levels.

Malta's overall investment in education is among the highest in Europe, despite a slight decrease since 2009 (from 5.4% in 2009 to 5.2% in 2019). Several reform measures backed by substantial investment have been taken to foster quality, inclusion and improvement of learning outcomes. Steady and sustained progress has been achieved in significantly reducing the rate of early school leaving to 17.2% in 2019 (European commission, 2020). The shift towards more open-ended learning pathways in the public school system is yielding its first preliminary results; the reform My journey: achieving through different paths ⁽¹⁾ which started implementation in lower secondary school (in the school year 2019/20) shows a positive impact within the State school system. Work is under way to improve the quality of teaching, the working conditions of teachers/trainers and the attractiveness of the profession, including improved remuneration. An increase in tertiary education attainment (50.3% for foreign-born, compared to the EU average of 35.3%) has been recorded. Despite the highest employment rate in the EU of recent tertiary graduates (ISCED 5-8), at 95% compared to the EU average of 85% in 2019, the skills shortages and mismatches remain. This may explain the fact that Malta relies on foreigners to fill skills shortages. (European commission, 2019). According to the data provided by the National Statistics Office, in 2019 almost a half of foreign workers are high-skilled (57.7% of EU nationals and 35.2% of non-EU nationals), against 44.2% of Maltese workers ⁽²⁾.

Since 2007, Malta has been implementing an eight-level comprehensive framework for lifelong learning (MQF). This includes qualifications and awards at all levels acquired through formal, non-formal and informal learning. The main body in charge of MQF is the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). In 2009, MQF was referenced to the EQF and to the QF-EHEA as well

⁽¹⁾ <http://www.myjourney.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/My-Journey-Booklet.pdf>

⁽²⁾ These percentages are provided by Malta's National Statistics Office for the purpose of this country chapter update.

as the transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth (TQF). The referencing report was updated several times (the last in 2016).

Policy objectives

The Malta qualifications framework (MQF) makes the qualifications system easier to understand and review, and more transparent at national and international levels. This framework also functions as a referencing tool for describing and comparing national and foreign qualifications to promote and address the following issues:

- (a) aiding transparency and understanding of qualifications nationally and internationally;
- (b) valuing all formal, informal and non-formal learning;
- (c) improving overall consistency and coherence 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) the shift towards learning outcomes-based qualifications;
- (g) a 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.

The MQF is seen as an important tool in promoting lifelong learning and validation of non-formal and informal learning. Its quality assurance function is getting stronger in line with the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education institutions ⁽³⁾.

Levels, learning outcomes and qualifications

The MQF has eight learning-outcomes-based qualification levels, plus the two entry levels below EQF level 1; introductory levels A and B. These two new levels have no equivalence on the EQF and have been introduced to recognise any prior

⁽³⁾ This framework was officially launched in July 2015.
<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/National%20Quality%20Assurance%20Framework%20for%20Further%20and%20Higher%20Education.pdf>

learning, as well as to provide a stepping stone towards MQF/EQF level 1 and further learning and employment ⁽⁴⁾. 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 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 strong focus on key competences.

MQF is a comprehensive framework with all types of qualifications, including general, vocational, higher education and adult education, acquired in formal, non-formal and informal learning; it provides a clear commitment to focus on the learning outcomes approach at policy level and programme and qualifications design.

Strengthening the learning outcomes approach has become fundamental to education and training reform in all qualifications and at all levels. It is reinforced by the education strategy framework 2014-24 – *Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability* ⁽⁵⁾ – linked to the MQF and the *National lifelong learning strategy 2020* ⁽⁶⁾, and to update of learning programmes and assessment modes.

In general education, the reform of the national curriculum framework (NCF) has led to the development of learning outcomes for all subjects in compulsory education, promoting inclusion, diversity and citizenship. Following the 2016 preparation of the learning outcomes framework (LOF) by the government ⁽⁷⁾ to support the national curriculum framework (NCF), implementation started in September 2019, under the new 2017 collective agreement ⁽⁸⁾. The LOF is intended to lead to more curricular autonomy of 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. Each attainment level in the framework comprises of a list of learning outcomes and/or grading criteria in the case of

⁽⁴⁾ They were introduced with the 2016 version of the Referencing report. These are not yet included in legislation.

⁽⁵⁾ Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014a).

⁽⁶⁾ Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014b).

⁽⁷⁾ <http://www.schoolslearningoutcomes.edu.mt/en/>

⁽⁸⁾ In December 2017, the Malta Union of Teachers and the Education Ministry signed a sectoral agreement for 2018-22. The agreement includes a significant salary increase for educators across the different levels; allowances for professional development and career progression based on voluntary professional development (European Commission, 2018).

vocational subjects ⁽⁹⁾. Both the NCF and the LOF will form the backbone of Maltese education programmes and will serve as national benchmarks of excellence for schools during each of the three cycles: the early, primary and secondary years ⁽¹⁰⁾.

The government has also worked on a reform called *My journey: achieving through different paths*, that started implementation in lower secondary school in the school year 2019/20 ⁽¹¹⁾. As of September 2019, secondary school students can choose between general, vocational or applied subjects, in addition to the core curriculum. The current focus is to move from a 'one size fits all' system to a more inclusive one catering to pupils' individual aptitudes, and to make it more equitable to reduce the number of early school leavers ⁽¹²⁾ (European Commission, 2019). Measures are being taken to retain teachers in the service and attract more students to the teaching profession ⁽¹³⁾: work conditions and teacher salaries have improved following the latest sectoral agreement and teachers currently have the possibility of accelerated career progression through professional development (European Commission, 2018).

In vocational education and training (VET), Malta is developing national occupational standards – referred to the MQF – to inform VET programmes ⁽¹⁴⁾. The NCFHE has published around 80 national occupational standards in different sectors. The MQF level descriptors are utilised in the drafting, reviewing and publishing of occupational standards in the following sectors: automotive, building

⁽⁹⁾ There are three categories of (general education) subjects, one category of VET MQF level 1 subjects and entry level subjects. More information at:

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

⁽¹⁰⁾ Gradual implementation will continue until the year 2022/23 when new learning programmes will be available throughout the compulsory education system (European Commission, 2019).

⁽¹¹⁾ See MEDE (2016).

⁽¹²⁾ The Ministry for Education and Employment has already set up a committee of different education bodies such as the University of Malta and Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) to provide training for new and existing teachers. The Haaga Helia University of Sciences will provide training to teachers in vocational education.
https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/ongoing-reforms-and-policy-developments-43_en

⁽¹³⁾ This includes a higher grant to students who follow the initial teacher education (ITE) course at the University of Malta and the introduction of a number of ITE courses as part time evening courses both by the University of Malta and the Institute for Education.

⁽¹⁴⁾ The national occupational standards published by NCFHE consist of a set of job-related standards that highlight the performance expected from an individual when carrying out a specific function. These standards define the main jobs that people carry out, and link qualifications to the requirements of the labour market.

and construction, hair and beauty, health and social care, hospitality and tourism, IT, printing and digital media ⁽¹⁵⁾. Occupational standards are used in validation of non-formal and informal learning and help guide the curriculum development ⁽¹⁶⁾. Malta also has a range of adult education courses accredited and level-rated on the MQF. These qualifications and awards enable adults to engage in lifelong learning and progress to higher MQF levels.

Learning programmes developed in higher education are being remodelled based on learning outcomes ⁽¹⁷⁾. There are two types of higher education institution: self-accredited and licensed private further and higher education institutions whose courses are accredited by NCFHE; these courses are described in terms of learning outcomes (NCFHE, 2016a). The programmes of self-accrediting institutions ⁽¹⁸⁾ are subject to external quality assurance audits where they are checked for a learning-outcomes base distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competences (NCFHE, 2016c). Following the setting up of ESF project 1227 *Making quality visible* ⁽¹⁹⁾, the NCFHE has established the national quality assurance framework (NCFHE, 2015a), which sets the standards for internal and external quality assurance for all further and higher education providers.

Malta also embarked on the VET credit conversion system project with the aim of testing and implementing the ECVET credit system at a national level ⁽²⁰⁾. Through this project, 30 courses ⁽²¹⁾ were selected from different VET providers

⁽¹⁵⁾ https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx

⁽¹⁶⁾ Malta continued to implement the 2018 Work-based Learning and Apprenticeship Act, in the year 2019-20 (European Commission, 2019).

⁽¹⁷⁾ The course descriptions are the ones offered by the state VET providers, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), and the higher education provider, University of Malta.

⁽¹⁸⁾ In Malta there are self-accrediting education and training institutions as identified by Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. These include the University of Malta; the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology; and the Institute of Tourism Studies.

⁽¹⁹⁾ ESF Project 1.227 *Making Quality Visible*.
<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/National%20Quality%20Assurance%20Framework%20for%20Further%20and%20Higher%20Education.pdf>

⁽²⁰⁾ This was supported by the Leonardo da Vinci project for lifelong learning of the European Commission.

⁽²¹⁾ The courses represented a variety of areas and fields of study at different MQF levels from both the public and private sectors, featuring a variety of initial VET (IVET) courses and continuing VET (CVET) courses targeted for all ages of the population.

and an ECVET conversion manual was developed ⁽²²⁾. Since then, ECVET in Malta is used for all VET programmes from MQF/EQF level 1 up to MQF/EQF level 4.

Institutional arrangements and stakeholder involvement

A wide range of stakeholders has been involved in developing and setting up the MQF, which is firmly legally embedded. Building on the legal notice (347) of 2005 ⁽²³⁾, the legal basis of the MQF for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards was further strengthened in 2012 ⁽²⁴⁾. To support implementation, two more legal notices on quality assurance and licensing of further and higher education institutions and programmes were prepared; validation of informal and non-formal learning laid a firm foundation for the MQF implementation (see below).

The NCFHE (under the Ministry for Education and Employment) was established as Malta's national quality assurance agency, replacing the Malta Qualifications Council and the National Commission for Higher Education. It became the authority responsible for all aspects of the MQF implementation, particularly for maintaining the Malta qualifications framework ⁽²⁵⁾. It is also the EQF national coordination point (NCP) for Malta and runs the Qualifications and Recognition Information Centre (QRIC) which is responsible for providing the referencing and equivalence of foreign qualifications ⁽²⁶⁾. The NCFHE acts as the competent authority for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of providers and programmes in further and higher education. In the implementation of the MQF, the NCFHE cooperates with the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (based at the Ministry for Education and Employment) that is responsible for quality assurance and standards in compulsory education

⁽²²⁾ The ECVET manual which includes information for ECVET in the Maltese VET system, the use of learning outcomes and MQF for different stakeholders:
<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Accreditation/ECVET%20Conversion%20manual.pdf>

⁽²³⁾ See Government of Malta (2012d).

⁽²⁴⁾ Government of Malta (2012). Legal notice 294 on MQF for lifelong learning regulations. (Subsidiary Legislation 327.431).
<http://www.justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11927>

⁽²⁵⁾ Following Subsidiary Legislation SL 327.431, an MQF coordinator is appointed by the Commission and is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Malta Qualifications Framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020)

⁽²⁶⁾ The Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (QRIC) within NCFHE also forms part of the European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC) and the National Recognition Information Centres in the European Union (NARIC).

(²⁷). The NCFHE is also responsible for establishing a national validation system, with necessary structures, and leads development and implementation of occupational standards in cooperation with social partners and sector skills units (²⁸) and other stakeholders such as Jobsplus and Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). Since September 2019, the NCFHE has set up an MQF working group made up of representatives from different national stakeholders, to support the development of the MQF.

The MQF is seen to have improved cooperation between stakeholders (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020) through meetings such as the annual national colloquium and the Network on Quality Assurance Professionals in Further and Higher Education, known as Net-QAPE (²⁹). NCFHE is an affiliate member of ENQA (³⁰). As an outward looking framework, the MQF has enabled cooperation with stakeholders outside the country, such as the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, in the context of the impact assessment study of the MQF (see section on NQF implementation).

Recognising and validating non-formal and informal learning and learning pathways (³¹)

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) in Malta is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation 327.432 of 2012 (³²), which sets the principles for the process and allows validation to take place up to Level 5 of the MQF. The value and importance of validation are emphasised in several national policy

(²⁷) <https://education.gov.mt/en/education/quality-assurance/Pages/default.aspx>

(²⁸) See Government of Malta (2016).

(²⁹) In December 2013 the NCFHE set up a Network on Quality Assurance Professionals in Further and Higher Education, known as Net-QAPE. The aim of Net-QAPE is to bring together all personnel involved in quality assurance in the education sector, to provide concrete and continuing support, upskilling and continuous professional development. Net-QAPE is a key concept in the commitment of the NCFHE to developing a national further and higher education quality assurance framework, which will be the basis for internal and external quality processes and audits.
<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Documents/QA%20Communications/2014/Comm%20No%2006%202014%20-%20First%20Meeting%20of%20Net-QAPE.pdf>

(³⁰) ENQA is the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education.
<https://enqa.eu/>

(³¹) This section draws mainly on input from the 2018 update of the European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning (Gatt, 2019).

(³²) Government of Malta (2012), Legal Notice 296/2012 (2012), Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning Regulations
<http://justiceservices.gov.mt/DownloadDocument.aspx?app=lom&itemid=11928&l=1>

documents ⁽³³⁾, reinforcing the potential of validation of non-formal and informal learning in Malta.

Malta has developed occupational standards in vocational education (see section on learning outcomes). There are around 80 published occupational standards in seven different sectors that are used in validation of non-formal and informal learning and also to help guide curriculum development. All those who successfully achieve their validation assessment in Malta receive an award in their occupation, so this process automatically links the validation process to the MQF. The NCFHE has published several leaflets ⁽³⁴⁾ on the validation of non-formal and informal learning whereby it was promoted that awards obtained as such include an MQF level (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

Validation of non-formal and informal learning is available in the following occupational sectors: automotive, building and construction, hair and beauty, health and social care, hospitality and tourism, IT, printing and digital media ⁽³⁵⁾. Since 2018, approximately 800 certificates stating the MQF levels for applicants who obtained their awards through the validation of non-formal and informal learning have been issued (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020). Both the validation of non-formal and informal learning and the MQF have a common objective – that of enabling individuals to advance based on their learning outcomes – but ensuring that assessment and accreditation systems are geared up to meet the needs of the sector is a continued challenge. The NCFHE, in agreement with the sector skills units ⁽³⁶⁾, does not implement validation itself but

⁽³³⁾ These documents include: Malta's *National lifelong learning strategy 2020* (Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2020) that sets a target for setting up a transparent and sustainable system within NCFHE to validate and recognise non-formal and informal learning by the end of 2016; and the *National youth policy: towards 2020* published in 2015 (Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport (2015) stating that the validation of non-formal and informal learning would be pursued.

⁽³⁴⁾ https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/ECVET%20Leaflet%20Seminar%2019_To%20Print%203mm%20bld%20CMYK.pdf

⁽³⁵⁾ https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx

⁽³⁶⁾ Sector skills units develop occupational standards for their relevant economic sector; they identify the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their sector. 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 the validation of non-formal and informal learning. The government set up the National Skills Council in 2016 with the remit of involving the labour market in the planning of labour market preparation, and to tackle skills shortages. The NCFHE and the National Skills Council have worked together to analyse which sectors would benefit from a sector skills unit.

subcontracts other public or private entities to carry out the assessment required for the validation of non-formal and informal learning of candidates. Entities entrusted with the validation process have been extended from Jobsplus⁽³⁷⁾ in childcare, building and construction and hair and beauty to the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). The NCFHE signed a memorandum of understanding with ITS to carry out assessment for the hospitality and tourism sector⁽³⁸⁾, which started in mid-2019. Since then, the NCFHE has collaborated with the Malta Tourism Authority which subsidised the application fee for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. In the first year, 30 applicants obtained their award through the validation of non-formal and informal learning. At the end of 2020, the Malta Tourism Authority, the Institute of Tourism Studies, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education and the sector skills unit cooperated to analyse the first year of validation in the tourism sector and see what can be done to incentivise such a measure.

In the context of making efforts to improve the quality of adult learning, the University of Malta created the Department of Arts, Open Communities and Adult Education. In 2018, the department launched the Recognition of prior learning programme for holders of qualifications and experience in adult education and training. This programme has been developed for those holding qualifications in adult education or an equivalent who wish to pursue the master degree course in adult education (European Commission, 2019).

Malta has been working towards the implementation of 2012 Council recommendations on VNFIL⁽³⁹⁾. One of the main aims of VNFIL in Malta is to increase lifelong learning and employability, as the awards obtained through VNFIL help candidates in career development or to further their studies. The extension to a number of sectors, the increase in the number of national occupational standards and awarded certificates acquired through validation of non-formal and informal learning is promising.

⁽³⁷⁾ Jobsplus is the successor to the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC). Its objective is to meet the needs of employers, jobseekers and employees: Jobsplus acts as assessment agency on behalf of the NCFHE in assessing individuals on their informal and non-formal learning based on occupational standards developed by the respective sector skills units: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>

⁽³⁸⁾ More information available at: <http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/el/news-and-press/news/malta-vinfl-takes>

⁽³⁹⁾ See Council of the European Union (2012).

NQF implementation and impact

The MQF is operational; key documents and responsibilities for its implementation have been agreed among stakeholders and published ⁽⁴⁰⁾. The MQF is a comprehensive framework, including qualifications from all education sectors and types ⁽⁴¹⁾; the framework is firmly legally embedded and forms an integrated part of the overall national qualification system, including links to relevant legislation and policy strategies, the *Framework for the education strategy for Malta 2014-24* ⁽⁴²⁾, the *National lifelong learning strategy 2020* ⁽⁴³⁾, the *Education Act 2019* ⁽⁴⁴⁾, the *National literacy strategy for all in Malta and Gozo 2014-19* ⁽⁴⁵⁾ and the *Strategic plan for the prevention of early school leaving in Malta 2014* ⁽⁴⁶⁾.

The MQF has a distinction between qualifications and awards, based on the workload required and measured in credit points ⁽⁴⁷⁾. Qualifications and awards should satisfy the following conditions in order to become accredited and included in the MQF (Government of Malta, 2012c):

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

⁽⁴⁰⁾ See the relevant legislation at the end of this report: Government of Malta (2012a), (2012b) and (2012f).

⁽⁴¹⁾ Sector specific international qualifications such as Microsoft qualifications and CISCO are still outside the MQF. However, the Accreditation Unit at NCFHE has started an exercise where a comparability analysis is carried out to compare the ‘unrecognised’ programme to the MQF. A pilot project has been done with IMLI – International Maritime Law Institute – and their Master degree in Law and Doctoral programme have been compared to the MQF Level 7 and level 8 respectively.

⁽⁴²⁾ <https://education.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Policy%20Documents%202014/B00KLET%20ESM%202014-2024%20ENG%2019-02.pdf>

⁽⁴³⁾ See Maltese Ministry of Education and Employment (2014b).

⁽⁴⁴⁾ See Government of Malta (2019). Education Act.

⁽⁴⁵⁾ <https://education.gov.mt/en/Documents/Literacy/ENGLISH.pdf>

⁽⁴⁶⁾ <https://lifelonglearning.gov.mt/dbfile.aspx?id=47>

⁽⁴⁷⁾ The term ‘qualification’ refers to substantial courses based on learning outcomes at the respective MQF level and a required minimum number of credits, whereas ‘award’ refers to courses which fulfil the level of learning, but not the requirement in terms of minimum credits. The terms are used to distinguish between ‘full qualifications’ and shorter courses at the respective level.

As a first step, the NCFHE has established two lists: one of accredited further and higher education institutions and one of accredited courses and qualifications with MQF and EQF levels indicated ⁽⁴⁸⁾. The NCFHE maintains both lists ⁽⁴⁹⁾ in accordance with Subsidiary Legislation 327.433 on licensing, accreditation and quality assurance ⁽⁵⁰⁾. Qualifications and courses from VET and higher education have been included in the lists, as well as non-formal and private ones. A national qualifications database in line with the EQF recommendation is under development, expected to be operational by November 2020 ⁽⁵¹⁾.

MQF and EQF levels are included in general, vocational and higher education qualifications provided by public institutions. They are included in all newly developed accredited qualifications from private providers and Europass certificates and diploma supplements issued to all graduates by public and private bodies ⁽⁵²⁾.

The MQF is used by education and training institutions and providers, guidance and counselling practitioners, though the level of awareness differs ⁽⁵³⁾. Malta's Public Employment Service, Jobsplus ⁽⁵⁴⁾ also uses the MQF as its main criterion for issuing work permits ⁽⁵⁵⁾, and MQF levels are used in incentive schemes such as scholarships and tax rebates (Cedefop, 2017). There is also cooperation and coordination between Europass/Euroguidance contact points and NCFHE in Malta. Regular meetings take place and the three networks collaborate during dissemination events, promotion materials and on a joint website ⁽⁵⁶⁾. An effective network to promote use of the NQF has been established with employers by the NCFHE through its qualifications recognition information centre. Other methods of informing potential users about the framework include social media and the NCFHE website, which is continuously updated, as well as dissemination of

⁽⁴⁸⁾ <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx>

⁽⁴⁹⁾ Both registers are available at: <http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/register/Pages/register.aspx>

⁽⁵⁰⁾ See Government of Malta (2012a).

⁽⁵¹⁾ An eight-month extension was granted allowing the database to be ready by the end of November 2020 and linked to the QDR as well as the EUROPASS portal.

⁽⁵²⁾ For VNFIL certificates, only the MQF level is indicated. Starting August 2020, all VNFIL certificates will include both EQF/MQF levels (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

⁽⁵³⁾ Jobseekers tend to check the MQF levels, depending on the job requirements (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

⁽⁵⁴⁾ Previously known as the Employment and Training Corporation:
<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>

⁽⁵⁵⁾ The majority of third country nationals working in Malta are using a single permit issued by Identity Malta. Jobsplus is only responsible for conducting the labour market check.

⁽⁵⁶⁾ <http://europass.eupa.org.mt/networks/>

information posters, leaflets/booklets ⁽⁵⁷⁾ and an explanatory video aimed at public and private education institutions, local councils, and other government entities. The creation of an MQF logo, which was launched in August 2020, has given more visibility to the framework (European Commission and Cedefop, 2020).

A study on the widespread understanding and appreciation of the Malta qualifications framework (MQF) and the European qualifications framework (EQF) ⁽⁵⁸⁾ was conducted by NCFHE in 2016. One of the key messages of the study was that the level of awareness of the MQF was high (6.9 out of 10), but awareness of the link between the MQF and the EQF was lower (6.61 out of 10). Due to the lack of systematic evidence around the framework's impact, the NCFHE has initiated an MQF impact assessment to review it. In 2019, an MQF working group was also set up to support the development of the MQF. By the end of 2020, the NCFHE aimed to assess the impact of the MQF across a wide number of sectors/stakeholders, and provide recommendations on possible areas of both policy and technical improvements for the MQF and its referencing to the EQF ⁽⁵⁹⁾. A final report will be issued (NCFHE, 2020).

Referencing to the EQF

The MQF was referenced to the EQF and the qualifications framework in the European higher education area (QF-EHEA) in a combined report in 2009. Further editions were published in 2010, 2012 and 2016 ⁽⁶⁰⁾. The MQF is also referenced to the transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth (TQF).

⁽⁵⁷⁾ Promoting the Malta Qualifications Framework through accreditation, recognition and validation

https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/The%20Malta%20Qualifications%20Framework/Promoting%20the%20MQF_NCFHE%20generic.pdf

Internal and external quality assurance in further and higher education booklet for training providers in developing their internal quality assurance processes and procedures

<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/Quality%20Assurance/Internal%20and%20External%20Quality%20Assurance%20in%20Further%20and%20Higher%20Education%20A4%20Brochure.pdf>

⁽⁵⁸⁾ See NCFHE (2016b).

⁽⁵⁹⁾ In carrying out this project, the NCFHE is collaborating with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership as it has an established record of regularly evaluating Scotland's NQF both overall and across specific sectors.

⁽⁶⁰⁾ See all four editions online: http://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/referencing_report.aspx

Important lessons and 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 for referencing to the EQF and the QF-EHEA were interrelated processes that helped bridge the gap between stakeholders from different subsystems of education and employment.

The MQF is a permanent and visible feature of the national education, training and qualifications system. It improves transparency by providing a map of, and reference to, all nationally recognised qualifications and awards, indicating NQF/EQF levels on certificates and diplomas, and providing a reference point for development and review of standards and curricula. It is an important tool in the shift to learning-outcomes-based qualifications and in promoting lifelong learning by improving access, progression and mobility, and validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences. It also has a quality assurance function, supporting the national quality assurance framework for further and higher education institutions. The framework supports end-users to progress in learning, notably through the list of accredited further and higher education institutions and courses. All courses accredited by NCFHE are included in the list of accredited courses with identifiable credit points, improving quality in the educational system. Over 4 000 qualifications and awards are currently recognised on the MQF. A national qualifications database – under construction – will further improve the transparency of single qualifications: the existing list does not contain detailed information on levelled qualifications and their learning outcomes, but only lists qualifications assigned to MQF levels. The database will also include all programmes offered by the three self-accrediting institutions. These are not included in the current register.

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, the development of validation of non-formal and informal learning and the national qualifications database, as well as the transitions towards online learning ⁽⁶¹⁾. The delivery of further and higher education programmes has shifted to online learning due to Covid-19 but it is early to say how effective distancing learning is and whether the technological/infrastructure setup is up to the standard required; early results have revealed a positive response. In view of the COVID pandemic and school closures, Malta shifted to e-learning to ensure a seamless transition to remote learning on Malta's already-

⁽⁶¹⁾ The NCFHE through the ECVET project organised an online webinar on digital learning for all providers to help them in the switch towards online learning.

established digital platforms. The teachers responded to online teaching in an effective manner while online support was provided to parents and students who do not have access to a computer or internet connection at home.

The planned impact study will shed light on awareness, trust, transparency and responsiveness to the needs of society, as well as the extent to which the MQF encompasses all programmes from all types of learning pathways (VET/academic, formal/non-formal/informal, all levels, all sectors) addressing adequately learner diversity and the 21st century skills (NCFHE, 2020).

Main sources of information

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) is the EQF NCP: <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/default.aspx>

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

List of accredited further and higher education institutions and courses.

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

Malta Ministry of Education and Employment; NCFHE (2016). *Referencing of the Malta qualifications framework to the European qualifications framework and the qualifications framework of the European higher education area.*

https://ec.europa.eu/ploteus/sites/eac-eqf/files/malta_referencing_report_2016.pdf

Infographic of the MQF/MQF overview table

NQF levels	Qualifications ⁽⁶²⁾	EQF levels
8	Doctoral degree	8
7	Master degree	7
	Postgraduate diploma	
	Postgraduate certificate	
6	Bachelor degree	6

⁽⁶²⁾ Awards are not mentioned in this table.

<https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/resources/Documents/Publications/The%20Malta%20Qualifications%20Framework/The%20Malta%20Qualifications%20Framework.pdf>

NQF levels	Qualifications ⁽⁶²⁾		EQF levels
5	Undergraduate diploma Undergraduate certificate	VET higher diploma foundation degree	5
4	Matriculation certificate Advanced level Intermediate level	VET diploma (iv)	4
3	General education (level 3) SEC grade 1 to 5	VET level 3 (iii)	3
2	General education (level 2) SEC grade 6-7	VET level 2 (ii)	2
1	General education (level 1) School leaving certificate	VET level 1 (i)	1
B	Introductory level B (*)		
A	Introductory level A (*)		

(*) These are not yet included in legislation. They were introduced with the 2016 version of the referencing report.

- (i) A full VET level 1 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as a full secondary school certificate and profile (SSC&P) Level 1.
- (ii) A full VET level 2 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as four secondary education certificate (SEC) subjects at grade 6 and 7.
- (iii) A VET level 3 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as six secondary education certificate (SEC) subjects at grades 1 to 5.
- (iv) A VET diploma should enjoy the same parity of esteem as the matriculation certificate

Source: Adapted from NCFHE and Ministry of Education and Employment (2020).

Acronyms

ENQA	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	European qualifications framework
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
LOF	learning outcomes framework
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MQC	Malta Qualifications Council

MQF	Malta qualifications framework
MQRIC	Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre
NCHE	National Commission for Higher Education
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NCF	national curriculum framework
NCP	national coordination point
Net-QAPE	Network on quality assurance professionals in further and higher education
NQF	national qualifications framework
QF-EHEA	qualifications framework in the European higher education area
QRIC	Qualifications and Recognition Information Centre
SEC	secondary school certificate
TQF	transnational qualifications framework of the small States of the Commonwealth
UOM	University of Malta
VET	vocational education and training
VNFIL	validation of non-formal and informal learning

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