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COUNTRY REPORT: **MALTA**

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1 Abstract

In Malta, validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) focuses on the award of specific qualifications in select sectors based on skills and experience from working in a related job. The main area of progress in VNFIL has involved the development of National Occupational Standards which is the key reference for assessment. There are now National Occupational Standards in eight sectors (automotive, building and construction, childcare, hair and beauty, health and social care, hospitality and tourism, information technology, printing, and digital media). There has also been progress in the development of validation assessment centres. In 2018, only Jobsplus and the Institute of Tourism Studies carried out assessments, but now there are an additional three centres (AME, Learning Works, and TCTC Malta) that cover the building and construction sector. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is broader and is defined as a concept that enables individuals to have their learning and experiences recognised for several purposes. It may involve being admitted to or gain exemptions to components or parts of a formal qualification or award, formative RPL, summative RPL, and credit transfer. There are new guidelines for education institutions to introduce RPL as part of their Internal Quality Assurance Policy.

2 Introduction

As was the case for the 2018 Inventory, validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) is a term used in Malta to refer to selected vocational sectors which work with stakeholders and National Occupational Standards to conduct and validate assessment to enable MFHEA to award qualifications based wholly on experience. VNFIL is a form of recognition of prior learning (RPL) and is seen as a separate and distinct process to the RPL process (MFHEA, 2021). RPL is defined as a concept that enables individuals to have their learning and experiences recognised for a number of purposes. It may involve being admitted to or gain exemptions to components or parts of a formal qualification or award, formative RPL, summative RPL, and credit transfer.

There has been no change to the definition of validation or the approach to validation in Malta. As stated in the 2018 Inventory, VNFIL in Malta is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation No 327.432 of 2012 (Government of Malta, 2012). This legislation allows validation of informal and non-formal learning (VNFIL) to take place up to Level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), based on occupational standards developed by the Sector Skills Units of the relevant economic sector. This is still the case in 2023.

The 4th Edition of the Referencing Report of the Malta Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework (NCFHE, 2016) published in 2016 is still the most recent report, although MFHEA is in the process of updating it. The report reflects a move towards a more modular based concept as building blocks for qualifications. Such an approach is intended to allow for and promote lifelong learning for non-traditional learners. It calls for better integration of non-formal learning within mainstream education routes as well as setting out the principles on which the validation of informal and non-formal learning is to be based.

As reported in 2018, the main area of progress in VNFIL has involved the development of National Occupational Standards. There are now National Occupational Standards in eight sectors (automotive, building and construction, childcare, hair and beauty, health and social care, hospitality and tourism, information technology, printing and digital media). There has also been an increase in the number of different job roles covered by National Occupational Standards, most notably in building and construction where there are 60 different roles (MFHEA, 2023a).

There has also been progress in the development of validation assessment centres. In 2018, only Jobsplus and the Institute of Tourism Studies carried out assessments, but now there are additional three centres (AME, Learning Works, and TCTC Malta) that cover the building and construction sector. The Institute of Tourism Studies focuses on hospitality and tourism and Jobsplus covers all of the other sectors where there are occupational standards as mentioned above (MFHEA, 2023a).

These developments fall within the 2012 Council Recommendations on the Validation of informal and non-formal learning. In assessing how much of these recommendations have been achieved, it can be concluded that Malta:

- Has developed appropriate arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning which enable individuals to have knowledge, skills and competences which have been acquired through non-formal and informal learning validated, and an award obtained. This mainly occurs through the systematic assessment of knowledge, skills and competences set out in National Occupational Standards. Since 2018, the sectors where there are National Occupational Standards in place have increased from three to eight.
- The process of validation includes the recommended (Council of the European Union, 2012) processes for identification, documentation, assessment and certification of knowledge, skills and competences gained through informal and non-formal learning. Organisations must apply to become validation assessment centres and carry out validation in a systematic way. At present, there are five assessment centres, up from two in 2018. The overarching framework for the validation process is in line with the 2012 Council recommendations.
- Validation of informal and non-formal learning has always been linked to the Malta Qualifications Framework. This recommendation has been fully implemented.
- While there is recognition of the need to provide information and guidance, the support system for persons wanting to validate their learning needs to be further developed. There is a need for greater investment in human capacity and competence to provide guidance to those wanting to validate their learning. While the sector of career guidance has registered major professional development in recent years, less attention has been given to validation. Further investment in developing professional competency in supporting individuals in the validation process is required to fulfil the Council recommendation.
- Validation is a tool for the promotion of employment and career advancement and access to further studies. There is skills profiling among unemployed people by the employment advisors at Jobsplus. There are no specific efforts to support specifically disadvantaged groups, but validation provides opportunities which the normal education system does not. There will be a need for better communication with the public to convey the benefits of validation for employability.
- Although validation aims for parity of esteem, it is not clear whether qualifications obtained through validation are accepted for further education and training. However, this depends on the provider as each provider institution has discretion about what to accept. Recognition of prior learning for access to and exemption of training courses is well developed in all public Further and Higher education institutions. More emphasis, though, should be given to continuously promote the need for and importance of validation for candidates and for validation to be considered as an asset to education. Further effort to promote parity of esteem is also needed.
- Europass and Youthpass are promoted (not always for the purpose of validation), but application of ECTS and ECVET to validation is limited. Further work in this aspect needs to be undertaken. While all National Occupational Standards are written in terms of learning outcomes and are divided into units, it is difficult to link

these National Occupational Standards to ECVET points as it is challenging to quantify learning in terms of hours for non-formal and informal learning settings.

- Validation is based on the participation of the various key stakeholders, through the process of the development of occupational standards, as well as in the assessment process which includes the participation of assessors with technical knowledge. This is in line with the 2012 Council recommendations.

Malta has been working towards the 2012 Council Recommendations. The process has not been as fast as desired, but the extension of validation to more sectors represents good progress, and the full implementation of validation within Further and Higher education and training providers is promising. Key existing challenges include auditing and compliance of validation processes; developing further the service of guidance for validation; ensuring parity of esteem of qualifications obtained through validation in the labour market as well as for further education as part of lifelong learning.

3 National perspective

3.1 Overarching approach to validation

Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) involves identifying, documenting, assessing and certifying skills and competences to an MQF level as determined by the relevant National Occupational Standard. The validation assessment is carried out by experienced people within validation assessment centres. The validation of informal and non-formal learning can help individuals and affect, education and employment prospects by enabling them to gain entry to education and training courses, or gaining a qualification related to a specific occupational standard (SCQF Partnership, 2020).

MFHEA has been responsible for introducing a system for validation, setting up the resources for the VNFIL department, creating national awareness of VNFIL, convening meetings with key stakeholders and developing National Occupational Standards. The key principles are the main overseeing structure, structures at sectoral level, setting and updating occupational standards, conducting the validation assessment, issuing the certification, managing the system of redress and support.

The rationale behind national policies and their specific focus on validation was reinforced in the 2016 Referencing Report of the Malta Qualifications Framework to the European Qualifications Framework (NCFHE, 2016). This outlines that the focus is on helping individuals through validation of learning to enhance their education and employment prospects by enabling them to gain entry to education and training courses; gaining exemption from parts of a training course; or gaining a qualification related to a specific occupational standard.

The referencing report is now seven years old, and there is a recognition amongst key agencies that it needs updating. Indeed, an update is in process, but there is no indication yet about when it will be published.

Since the 2018 inventory, while the legislation and key policies supporting validation remain the same, there have been some further developments to help establish a national strategy and framework for validation.

Malta's **National Strategy Lifelong Learning 2020-2030** (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2021) has a strategic measure on the recognition and validation of prior learning. It sets out to "create dialogue with entities who are providing validation of prior learning to understand processes, provide support, discuss standards and streamline practices to develop practical validation arrangements together with stakeholders". It states that recognition of prior learning assessments will be included in standardisation and evaluation activities, and that assessors should give feedback

to learners, discussing the results and giving support and guidance on the options available to the learner.

As discussed in the 2018 Inventory, a **National Skills Council** was set up in around 2016. The National Skills Council had an advisory function and assumed an executive role as of early 2023. The Council's primary objective is to use evidence-based practices to understand and anticipate current and future skills within the labour work force, whilst instigating policy changes to this effect (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2023a). Part of the National Skills Council's remit is to support Sector Skills Units (SSUs) in developing National Occupational Standards and in this way, it will play a key role in VNFIL, although this is still subject to final agreements with MFHEA. Further capacity building within the National Skills Council would have likely had a positive impact on the promotion and spread of VNFIL. While the MFHEA up to now has been responsible for SSUs and the development of National Occupational Standards, this is an agenda that would be more in the scope of a specialised agency such as the National Skills Council and as such we could expect further development of VNFIL when this body becomes fully operational, with MFHEA still retaining its regulatory function.

There has also been some development in guidance issued to education institutions. The MFHEA produced new guidelines for education institutions on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy as part of their Internal Quality Assurance Policy (MFHEA, 2021). Further and higher education institutions can apply for permission to implement their RPL policy and as part of this they must adhere to the published RPL guidelines. It should be noted that this refers to RPL, and in Malta this has a specific definition in relation to VNFIL. The guidance states that "RPL is a concept that enables individuals to have their learning and experiences recognised for a number of purposes which can benefit the individual, employers and the economy which include: RPL for personal or career development; RPL to gain entry to an award or qualification; RPL for the award of ECTS points to gain exemption from parts of an existing programme of study or to gain entry with advanced standing; and VNFIL to award vocational qualifications after assessment to specific occupational standards". Therefore, VNFIL is a form of RPL.

There are no individual learning accounts in Malta. There is also no formal system of skills audits. As discussed in section 3.3, skills audits may be carried out by employers to assess employees skills and competences against national occupational standards.

3.2 Validation in education and training

Currently, VNFIL is very much focused on **VET**, and specifically work-based learning. The guiding idea is that employees with few or no qualifications gain recognition for their skills and competences to improve employability and career prospects.

There has been considerable progress in VNFIL in the VET sector. More National Occupational Standards, now amounting to 104 have been developed. The figure was 25 in 2018. They support the validation framework which has been established and cover: Automotive, Building and Construction, Hair and Beauty, Health and Social Care, Hospitality and Tourism, Information Technology, and Printing and Digital Media. The sectors with most advancement of Occupational Standards are Building and Construction (with 60 Standards, up from 20), Hospitality and Tourism (with 20 Standards up from 8), and Printing and Digital Media (with 12 Standards, up from 4) (MFHEA, 2023a).

Within the **compulsory education** sector, the validation of informal education activities are governed by regulations set by the Directorate for Standards and Quality

in Education and MFHEA¹. A Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSC & P) was introduced in September 2010 (Maltese Government Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, 2010), which recognises all forms of learning during the five years of secondary education. The SSC & P is meant to be a certification of the learner's experience in the secondary school. It is issued at the end of Year 11 as a proof of successfully completion of compulsory schooling. The SSC & P is divided in three sections, namely formal, non-formal (within school activities) and non-formal (after school activities). The certification may be issued at either MQF Level 3, 2 or 1 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2023b),

MFHEA's guidelines for education institutions on RPL Policy sets out the following principles (MFHEA, 2021):

RPL should always:

- be learner centred, fair and respect the privacy of the individual;
- take account of Equality & Diversity issues;
- be accessible and flexible;
- be given for the learning and not the experience alone;
- involve the use of the MQF in determining the level, volume and depth of evidence;
- be reliable, transparent and consistent;
- involve formal assessment for summative claims;
- be recognised to be of the same value of learning gained in formal learning;
- be quality assured both internally and externally; and
- be in line with any Statutory Legislation.

The guideline also states that institutions should have an overarching RPL policy which outlines:

- the scope and nature of their RPL activities including:
- the types of RPL service provided (e.g. types of learning recognised);
- how RPL can be used to gain access to or exemption from programmes of study within the institution;
- what can and cannot be recognised/transferred;
- extent of RPL allowed (see below);
- the responsibilities for the RPL processes within the institution;
- arrangements for staff development and capacity building in the area of RPL;
- how RPL recognition process and use of credit transfer is monitored and quality assured.

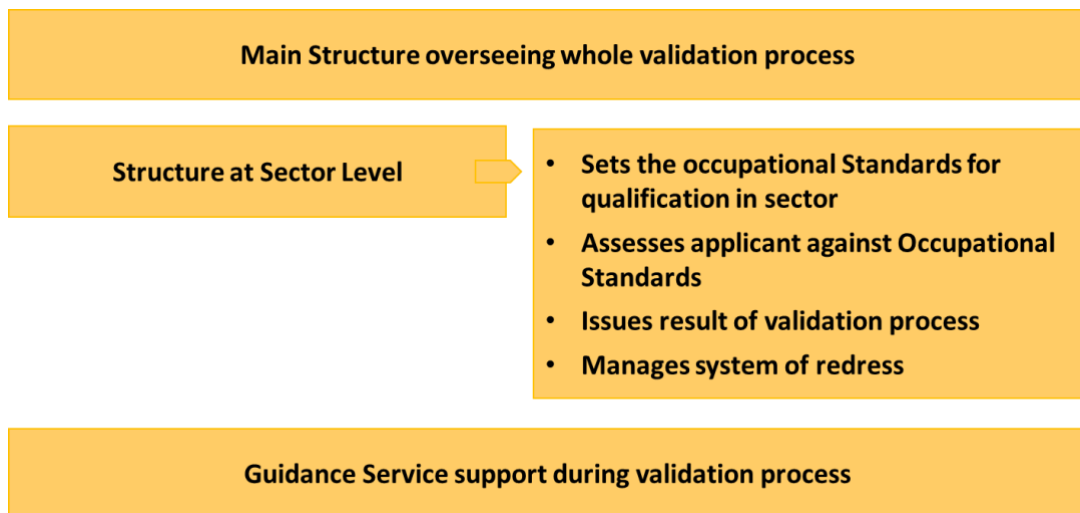
Within **higher education**, steps have been taken by the University of Malta to establish a system of validation which aligns more closely with the formal qualifications offered via Higher Education Institutions (University of Malta, 2016). The University of Malta has put in place validation arrangements for individuals who are over the age of 23 years who wish to apply to follow courses but do not possess the

¹ Details of these regulations can be found in the booklet Secondary School Certificate and Profile - Guidelines determining the verification of informal learning in secondary education (2010).

standard entry requirements. Applicants can now officially apply for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) to either gain access to undergraduate or taught post-graduate programmes of study, and or to gain exemptions from parts of academic programmes (University of Malta, 2016).

In terms of the extent to which the four stages of validation are included in the national validation arrangements, all four stages are present in the VNFIL process. As introduced in the previous section and illustrated below in Figure 3.1, the MFHEA (2016) Referencing Report also presents a clear overview of the main structures involved in the VNFIL, incorporating the different stages of validation. The report provides a differentiation between stages of validation and provides clarification on specific processes.

Figure 3.1 Structure involved in the validation of informal and non-formal learning



Source: NCFHE (2016) Referencing the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education

A key strength of the approach to validation in Malta is that it is aimed at increasing lifelong learning and employability, with an emphasis on the value of validation for the individual as a lifelong learner. Indeed, the MFHEA (2016) Referencing Report also considers the validation process from the applicant's perspective, represented in the following steps:

- Step 1: Decision to validate own learning.
 - For some individuals who may never have received formal training, they can voluntarily decide to have their learning, knowledge and skills validated. The law stipulates that applicants need to have a minimum of three years of work experience within the sector.
- Step 2: Provision of guidance to gather evidence of learning.
 - A mentor is assigned to every applicant, who then analyses the different experiences of the individual applicant and guides him/her in identifying ways of gathering evidence for their experience. The mentor has an important role to play in ensuring the evidence is compiled well and covers as much as possible the learner's experiences.
- Step 3: Assessment carried out.
 - Once evidence is compiled in a portfolio, it is presented to the assessing board. The assessment process always calls on the application for further assessment – this can be an interview, written exam or practical test.

- Step 4: Applicant receives outcome of assessment.
 - Once the assessment process has been carried out, the applicant receives the results. If the applicant has satisfied the requirements of the assessing board, certification will be issued. In the case that not all the performance criteria have been achieved or proved, the assessment report will identify the weaknesses and help the applicant prepare for a re-sit.
- Step 5: Applicant may contest assessment outcomes.
 - The applicant may disagree with the assessment outcome and has the option to apply for a revision of the assessment process. If the applicant applies for revision, a new and independent board is set up to review the assessment that had taken place.

Whilst there is no specific strategy in relation to validation of learning undertaken by means of open educational resources in Malta, the use of MOOCs, Open Course Ware and OER in general are certainly growing in momentum. As reported in the 2015 Apprenticeship Review (Cedefop, 2015), the Maltese government is giving due importance to the digital economy which is considered the backbone to Malta's future economy. The 2016 Referencing Report recognises the need for accreditation and quality assurance parameters for digital/online learning. ICT has, in fact, also been one of the areas of interest to the National Skills Council.

In addition, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), has developed the infrastructure for an e-learning platform. This project targets the skills base of the workforce so that individuals can adapt to shifting economic scenarios. Three key features are to provide:

- **Blended Learning:** to allow learners to engage in several training modules directly from home or their workplace through the e-learning platform.
- **Accreditation of Prior Learning (APL):** to encourage individuals in the labour market to further their studies by recognising their prior learning and exempting them from the relevant course modules.
- **Prior Experiential Learning/Accreditation of Prior experiential Learning:** to allow students who enrol into taught programmes of study to claim 'credits' for previous learning. The previous learning acquired from work, community or volunteer experience and which had previously not been assessed and/or awarded credit, must be relevant to the programme for which they are applying and if successful, the credit will count towards their programme of study.

3.3 Validation and the labour market

As discussed above, there has been progress in the development of National Occupational Standards and an increase in the number of different job roles covered by National Occupational Standards. This is important for the labour market because it allows for a standardisation of the criteria for performance, skills and knowledge for specific occupations. The standards can therefore help employers to carry out skills audit within their company. Occupational Standards for each sector are the basis for skills audit approaches, which are developed in collaboration with relevant stakeholders (MFHEA (2023b)). The Sector Skills Units (SSUs), which are intended to shift under the remit of the National Skills Council, have the responsibility for overseeing skills audit activities across their respective sector.

The role and responsibilities of the National Skills Council in relation to validation is still being established, but the work of the National Skills Council in identifying skills needs, skills profiling and development of occupational standards all play a key role in identifying the required skills and competencies across sectors, for the benefit of

employers and employees alike. Skills audit also supports the identification of skills gaps at an individual and organisational level. Supporting employers in how best to address skills gaps, and motivating individuals to develop is crucial. This needs to be underpinned by stakeholders to ensure that the validation system remains current and reflects changes at industry level.

As noted earlier, the National Skills Council assumed an executive role in early 2023. The main aim of the National Skills Council is that of minimising the skill gaps that exist in some of the sectors such as the digital, technical and financial sectors where Malta is, and can maintain, excellence. The National Skills Council also has the task to recommend policy changes to the government that would reduce these gaps and prepare the labour force with the right skills, to meet future challenges, characterised by the green and digital transitions. Since it started its work in 2016, the National Skills Council has been working on three main sectors: work-based learning; digital skills; and Research and Development in the Life Sciences. Recently the National Skills Council also initiated the process to develop a National Skills Strategy.

Validation and skills audit processes in the workplace may also be affected by MFHEA's upcoming guidelines for QA in Work-Based Learning (MFHEA, 2023b). The main objective of the Guidelines for Quality Assurance of Work-Based Learning is to provide clear guidelines to ensure that courses that include a work-based learning component, being extensive or limited, genuinely prepare prospective learners well for their professional futures in the long term. This has come about because of too much inconsistency in the way that employers support learners in the workplace and how they are assessed.

Jobsplus run a Trade Testing system for individuals who have acquired knowledge, skills and competence in a particular occupation but do not possess a formal qualification (Jobsplus, 2023). Through trade testing a person is assessed in a particular area by sitting for the following types of assessment: Interview; Portfolio; Theory test; Practical test. Candidates who successfully pass from the trade test are awarded a Certificate of Competence in that particular occupation. This system appears is connected to the MFHEA VNFIL system as Jobsplus is a licensed Validation Assessment Centre. There has also been a considerable focus on VNFIL in the construction industry. This is because to be able to work in the industry, all construction workers must possess a Construction Industry Skill Card by August 2023. This is explained in the box below. Please refer to the 2018 Inventory for more detail on the development of the Skills Card Initiative.

Box 1 Construction Industry Skill Card Initiative (CISC)

The Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) and the Ministry of Education created the Construction Industry Skills Card (CISC) scheme to bridge the gap between the supply of and demand for skilled employees and to tackle the lack of skills recognition and adequate training in the Maltese construction sector. The CISC scheme is intended to be the official skills registration and recognition scheme for all construction sector employees in Malta. The cards certify an employee's level of competence and ensure that skilled employees gain recognition in the market, both nationally and internationally, and ensure that customers can have confidence in the contractors they use. The scheme's long-term goals are to improve quality standards, health and safety practices, and working conditions in the Maltese construction sector.

The main benefits of the Skill Card are summarised in the table below:

Benefits of the Skill Card initiative	
Employees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Proof of skills, competence and qualifications; ■ Improves health and safety awareness; ■ Enhances employment prospects and opportunities.
Employers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improves health and safety awareness among workers;

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provides foundation for staff training and development and ensures that occupational health and safety training is renewed every five years; ■ Diminishes the risks of accidents on construction sites; ■ Identifies personnel vested with recognised safety awareness training skills and adequate competence; ■ Provides easy access and facilitates the correct choice of qualified human resources.
Customers:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Improves standards of workers resulting in a better reputation for the construction industry; ■ Encourages consumers to make use of the services provided by qualified workers; ■ Improves the quality of construction projects; ■ Increases the possibility of securing a better economic investment for Malta.

Workers are required to undertake the necessary training skills in relation to their type of trade. In relation to persons who are already practising their trade but do not possess any formal qualifications, there are opportunities for workers to undertake a trade test as evidence of their knowledge and skills. The trade test will require applicants to demonstrate, in a real or simulated workplace environment, their competence or otherwise, by virtue of their performance assessments. Applicants will be assessed by competent and qualified assessors and successful candidates will be awarded a Certificate or Diploma of Competence.

Successful applicants receive a photographic identity card which will serve as a means of evidence that the holder has undertaken adequate training in relation to the attainment of appropriate skills and competence required for that particular task.

At the time of its launch in 2016 the CISC was voluntary and free of charge. In 2023, it will be mandatory for workers to possess the card and there is a fee for obtaining it.

Source: Ministry for Education and Employment and the Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (2014); European Construction Sector Observatory (2018).

3.4 Validation and the third sector

There is no systematic validation in the third sector but there have been ad hoc projects and initiatives. For example, the National Youth Policy Towards 2020 (Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport, 2015) sets out a clear commitment to develop and implement initiatives that utilise both formal education and non-formal learning, as mutually reinforcing agents, with a view to enhancing young people's educational attainment levels and progression. In the context of employment and entrepreneurship, the Strategy commits to promoting an entrepreneurial spirit among young people through non-formal education and informal learning opportunities. In taking forward the Strategy, the MFHEA continues to work with a range of stakeholders across different sectors, including Aġenzija Żgħażaġħ (National Youth Agency).

One initiative in the third sector is the project on the validation of informal and non-formal learning of youth leaders in Catholic Church groups (Gellel and Rossi, 2017). The project aimed to provide a tool which acknowledges and accredits youth leaders' years of service as well as provides means to help them develop further. It also served as a way to help the Catholic Church gain greater credibility and accountability of the services rendered to young people. It is also a contribution to youth work in general and to all the third sector by proposing a tool that may be adapted to similar contexts. See the 2018 country report for further detail of this project.

4 Links to credentials and qualifications

The situation with links to credentials and qualifications is unchanged since the 2018 Inventory. See the 2018 report for a full discussion.

Malta has had a 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. Following the fourth update of the referencing of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) (NCFHE, 2016), the MQF has been updated with the insertion of two new levels: Introductory Level A and Introductory Level B. These cover the learning gained, but not yet rated at MQF Level 1 and recognise any learning that has taken place to serve as stepping stones towards MQF Level 1.

The level descriptors of the different MQF levels are specified in terms of learning outcomes and in terms of knowledge, skills and competences. 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 MFHEA has been to introduce national standards of knowledge, skills and competences and to ensure that these are systematically implemented and used.

Individuals are assessed against the standards set in the Malta Qualifications Framework. All those who successfully achieve their validation assessment in Malta receive an award in their particular occupation clearly pegged at an MQF level. This automatically links the validation process to the national qualifications framework. Both the validation of informal and non-formal learning and the Malta Qualifications Framework have a common objective – that of enabling individuals to advance based on their learning outcomes, i.e. the knowledge, skills and competences an individual has acquired and is able to demonstrate after completing a learning process. This is a continued challenge; to ensure that assessment and accreditation systems are geared up to meet the needs of the sector.

Credits

Malta's Qualifications Framework captures all levels and sectors in education. This referencing process consolidates the already existing credit system for Higher Education that helps map existing and new qualifications to the Framework. Assessment of learning outcomes entitles the learner to credit and therefore to a qualification recognised by the MQF.

The Level descriptors for the different MQF levels are specified in terms of learning outcomes and qualifications. These learning outcomes set the standard against which all Qualifications and Awards, within the national education system, are accredited. All courses accredited by MFHEA, as well as those conferred by the self-accrediting institutions, use credits.

One credit is defined as being equivalent to a workload of 25 hours of total learning. Education and training institutions can label credits as either ECTS or ECVETs, according to the orientation of the learning programme. Both ECVET and ECTS have the same hours of total learning.

To ensure ongoing validity and relevance of credits acquired, and to support meeting the needs of industry, consideration should be given to limiting the period of time for which a credit remains current and set a timeframe for updating these.

In ensuring transparency in qualifications and awards, the 2016 Referencing Report highlights the importance that essential information (MQF Level and number of credits) about any qualification and award is provided in the certification provided to learners who have successfully completed a programme or course of study. However, it is not possible, by looking at certificates, to know what has been obtained through validation. Even though the concepts of learning outcomes, modularisation and level descriptors form the basis of the national occupational standards in Malta, awards obtained through validation of informal and non-formal education are not associated to several credit points.

The major education institutions of Malta have their own specific policies to determine what the potential contribution of VNFIL, or more broadly RPL, is for awards (SCQF Partnership, 2020). The Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST) offers RPL for admission to an MCAST NVQ and offers RPL for no more than 50% towards a programme of study. There is no minimum credit claim stated. The applicant must have three years' sectoral experience. Units are awarded if the candidate can provide evidence in excess of 50% of each learning outcome. The candidate's transcript will clearly specify which units were exempted through the RPL process and will only be granted on completion of the entire programme of study.

The University of Malta offers RPL for up to one fifth of the total credits, although this is determined on a case-by-case basis. There is no minimum credit claim stated. There are no specific eligibility criteria stated (SCQF Partnership, 2020).

5 Standards

As previously mentioned, national occupational standards, now amounting to over 100, continue to be developed and implemented. Once the full network of Sector Skills Units have been established, the process of developing and implementing occupational standards will be undertaken across all occupational sectors. The development and implementation of these standards has had a significant impact on assessment procedures within the sector, and ultimately have supported the validation process, increasing accuracy and reliability.

Validation standards are usually of value to employers to know the level of skills and competences of applicants and/or their employees. They are of value to education and training providers as they direct the level and content of programmes of study. They are also of value to learners who can validate their learning and to identify the areas for further learning and development.

6 Institutions involved in validation arrangements and its coordination

In Malta, the Ministry for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation (MEYR) has the ultimate responsibility for the education system as a whole, including childcare and early years education, primary and secondary education, higher education, lifelong learning, and examinations. The Malta Further and Higher Education Authority (MFHEA), within MEYR, is the competent authority responsible for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and the validation of informal and non-formal learning.

The MFHEA promotes and maintains the Malta Qualifications Framework and the policies and criteria this structure is based upon. It is also responsible for the publication of the Referencing Report for Malta. Another responsibility of the MFHEA

is to oversee the licensing of Further and Higher educational institutions, including maintaining a database of licensed further and higher education providers, as well as managing the application and approval process for registration on the database.

The MFHEA has the responsibility for validation of informal and non-Formal Learning (VINFL) (MFHEA, 2023b). The MFHEA continues to develop the system of assessment, recognition and validation of informal and non-formal learning, which can ensure that the standards and guidelines are respected through internal and external verifiers. MFHEA's responsibilities with respect to the validation process include:

- Setting the standards and principles for the validation process which are to be followed;
- Regulating the bodies responsible for validating learning outcomes/occupational standards;
- Ensuring that quality assurance systems are put in place, that learners obtain a fair judgment;
- Monitoring the validation process;
- Acting as a catalyst to promote validation of as much invisible learning as possible (Ministry for Finance, Malta, 2013).
- Since the learner has a responsibility to ensure that his/her informal and non-formal learning can be validated, it is therefore important for the accrediting body to advise learners on how they can do this.

MFHEA is responsible for the approval and oversight of VNFIL assessment centres. There are currently five assessment centres: Jobsplus, ITS, AME, Learning Works, and TCTC Malta (MFHEA, 2023a). These are all public agencies or education providers, except one which is an employer. There is recognition of the need for a higher number of and wider spread of assessment centres in terms of both sector and type of institution.

Assessment centres are expected to follow the appropriate assessment procedure as agreed upon and supported by the Sector Skills Unit. A Validation Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Policy was published in September 2022 (MFHEA, 2022). The policy states that centres are obliged to prepare and present an internal quality assurance (IQA) policy based on the principles and mechanisms of VNFIL. This IQA policy is to include details on how quality assurance is maintained throughout the validation process and all related procedures. An IQA policy aims to ensure that validation assessments are carried out with transparency and fairness and that standard procedures are followed for all candidates. The IQA Policy for centres must include detailed information on the key phases of validation: identification, documentation, assessment, certification.

In supporting the development and implementation of a system of validation for Malta, it was necessary to establish a number of Sector Skills Units, with the role of identifying the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform occupations within their sector. These Sector Skills Units within MFHEA have the responsibility of:

- identifying the different jobs in their respective sector;
- outlining the knowledge, skills and competences required to perform these jobs;
- mapping these against the National Qualifications Framework;
- developing the National Occupational Standards.

A key function of the Units is to develop guidelines and mechanisms for the validation of non-formal and informal learning for all skills within their respective sector. They also ensure that the validation institutions are meeting the required standards set out for the validation of non-formal and informal learning.

Legislation stipulates that the MFHEA shall establish a Sector Skills Committee that would be responsible for formulating and developing the following:

- policies and procedures to govern the Sector Skills Units;
- criteria and standards for the validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- guidelines for the assessment of skills and competences for the purpose of the granting of awards by Sector Skills Units;
- guidelines for quality assurance in non-formal learning;
- occupational standards relevant to each economic sector; and,
- sectoral qualifications frameworks referenced to the Malta Qualifications Framework, on a proposal of the Sector

Under this legislation, the Committee has responsibility to appoint validation process managers and external evaluators as validation practitioners, with the aim of ensuring ongoing quality and trust in the validation process. It is also important to capture the experiences of individuals undergoing the validation process, to ensure that it effectively meets the needs of participants.

As discussed earlier, a National Skills Council was set up in around 2016, and was given executive power as of early 2023. The Council's primary objective is to use evidence-based practices to understand and anticipate current and future skills within the labour work force, whilst instigating policy changes to this effect. Part of the National Skills Council's remit is to support Sector Skills Units (SSUs) in developing National Occupational Standards and in this way, it will play a key role in VNFIL.

As previously noted, education and training providers, Higher Education institutions, industry and third sector organisations, as well as Trade Unions, and other stakeholder organisations all have designated roles to play in the development, implementation and maintenance processes of the national system for validation, particularly through their involvement in the SSUs.

The fact that Malta covers a relatively small area geographically, and that the territory is island-based (the islands of Malta and Gozo) and therefore does not have a significantly decentralised system of governance and administration, means that co-ordination between stakeholders is a relatively straightforward process. There are no significant obstacles reported, to engaging with and working collaboratively with stakeholders across different sectors. Co-ordination activity is generally led by the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority.

7 Outreach, awareness raising, provision of information, advice and guidance

7.1 Outreach and awareness-raising

In 2021, MFHEA led a campaign to promote the value of VNFIL. The slogan used was "validate your experience". It was partly aimed at migrants, to help to increase their chances of employment. The campaign was considered successful for raising awareness of the importance of recognising skills and competencies.

At a national level, guidelines for the process of validation of informal and non-formal learning are specified by MFHEA, together with information leaflets on the validation process. These information leaflets are targeted to specific groups including individual employers and voluntary organisations amongst others.

Further to these materials, information is also available online. Individuals can register their interest in validating their competences through online forms. This database is

not available online but will serve as means for transparency, quality assurance and for national interest with regards to the stocktaking of local skills and competences.

Jobsplus, as a central source of information, advice and guidance for individuals and employers, also has a key role in awareness-raising, and in particular in relation to recruitment.

7.2 Information, advice and guidance

Rather than being structured according to a network or institutional framework, the provision of information, advice and guidance in Malta is organised more on a project-based level. Of those networks that do exist, these tend to be more sector-specific. There is a central role for the MFHEA, which publishes the National Occupational Standards online making them available to the general public. It also provides support and advises people wishing to validate their informal or non-formal learning by guiding them, when applicable, to the appropriate validation assessment entity. Ultimately, individuals are supported and guided in a number of areas:

- On how to organise and document evidence of learning;
- On how to prepare for their assessment and what to do following the assessment decision; and,
- To help them to be familiar with the validation and assessment procedures, and to know the education system and have an understanding of the labour market.

Sector Skills Units are responsible for providing guidance and counselling services to individuals submitting their documented experiences for validation. This process is only used in a few cases, with the more common option being to have third parties carry out the validation process.

The Validation Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Policy states that centre's IQA must detail what guidance and assistance candidates shall be given prior to their application, including any websites, marketing, or advertisements.

Also, handbooks have been compiled to ensure that the candidates know exactly what to expect and how they are going to be assessed. Furthermore, it is recommended that assessors or tutors give feedback to candidates seeking validation, in relation to the gaps that may have been identified for them.

As noted above, the 2016 Referencing Report emphasises the importance of having a system in place with the responsibility of providing support and guidance to those who wish to validate their non-formal and informal learning. From a learner perspective, the provision of guidance to gather evidence of learning is a recognised step in the validation process. A mentor is assigned to every learner applying for validation and has a key role to play in supporting the individual identifying ways of gathering evidence for this experience to demonstrate the different learning outcomes that have been achieved. There is no charge for guidance as part of the validation process.

8 Validation practitioners

8.1 Profile of validation practitioners

There is no specific legislative requirement for selection of validation practitioners. Education institutions and providers are likely to take their own approaches.

8.2 Provision of training and support to validation practitioners

There is no particular training provided to assessors. Jobsplus provided training to the Trade Testing Board Members once as a one-off exercise a few years ago, whereby assessors were invited to attend an Award in Occupational Assessment set at MQF level 4. This course was designed and offered through the use of ESF funds. This training has not been provided again since.

8.3 Qualifications and experience

The MFHEA Validation Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Policy states that validation assessors should possess sufficient academic credentials to assess and validate knowledge, skills and competencies according to the respective NOS. They should at least have an academic qualification pegged at MQF Level 4, 5 or 6 in the sector and job occupation listed in the NOS to be able to be accepted as a technical expert and as an assessor. In the case where NOS in a specific sector are only pegged at MQF Level 2 and 3, assessors with an academic qualification at MQF 3 and supported by a number of years' experience in the sector/industry shall be accepted.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines (MFHEA, 2021) states that institutions' RPL processes should always involve an academic member of staff with the relevant subject knowledge to provide support to the candidate. This member of staff should have a clear understanding of the RPL procedure and have experience in working with the learning outcomes in the component or programme of study that the claim is being made toward.

9 Inputs, outputs and outcomes

9.1 Funding and costs

There is no specific budget allocation at a national level for validation of non-formal and informal learning. Limited funding is available to support the development of the Sector Skills Units, for example supporting the development of national occupational standards with stakeholders across relevant sectors. It is also important to ensure funding is allocated to support the professional development of supervisors in their role.

The National Skills Council dedicates part of its allocated annual budget for carrying out activities supporting validation of non-formal and informal learning, including research towards identifying new sectors that may benefit from having a Skills Card.

There are no costs to organisations as far as the validation process is concerned, except for an application fee to be a validation assessment centre (EUR 300). Further Education Institutions and Higher Education Institutions must also pay a fee of EUR 300 and EUR 500 respectively, to apply to introduce an RPL Policy at their institution.

For individuals who are unemployed, there is no cost; the Government funds the validation process through Jobsplus as part of Jobsplus's annual budget allocation.

A nominal fee is charged to those individuals who are employed to undergo the validation process. Such fee is not established by national authorities but is at the discretion of the individual assessment centres and education institutions.

Employers may be reluctant to pay for their employees to undergo VNFIL because they may not see a direct benefit to their business. They may also be concerned that with a new qualification, an employee may move jobs or seek higher salaries.

9.2 Beneficiaries and users of validation processes

9.2.1 Validation trends

There is limited data available regarding beneficiaries of the validation process. MFHEA keeps data on the number of individuals going through the validation process, this is done by Jobsplus and soon the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC), which pass the data to the MFHEA. Data collected relates to those who are involved in the different stages of the validation process, from application, through to completion. In March 2018, it was reported that approximately 400 people had gone through the validation process²: 292 in Childcare (since the Occupational Standards have been available the longest), 100 in Building and the rest in Hairdressing.

There is considerable value in undertaking longitudinal assessment of the impact of individuals who have completed the certification process as the number of individuals validating themselves grows. Research and analysis tracking the experience and progress of individuals will enable formative improvement of the process.

9.2.2 Validation users

There is currently no information available in relation to the users according to age, gender, qualification level, target group, citizenship status, etc.

9.2.3 Validation and disadvantaged groups

As mentioned above, whilst there are no specific policies, projects or initiatives in Malta directed to the validation of skills for immigrants and/or refugees, there are no restrictions preventing these target groups from accessing validation opportunities currently available. One important development in this respect is the Skill Cards initiative (see Box 1 above for further information). This initiative provides the possibility for individuals from non-EU Member States to obtain a Skills Card by means of undertaking a trade test to demonstrate, in a real or simulated workplace environment, their performance, competences or otherwise to be duly assessed.

The Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) highlights the need for the provision of clear advice and support systems to help migrants secure quick validation and recognition of academic and professional qualifications obtained in other countries, including non-EU countries. The validation of such qualifications is currently a significant barrier to the integration of migrants into the Maltese workforce.

There is no data available to evidence the benefits to individuals of validation. The validation process is relatively new to Malta, and therefore the systems are relatively embryonic. It is anticipated that the data collection approach currently being used for the sector in which the validation process is functioning will be extended once the system is spread across all sectors. This data will then be used to support research activity to explore and evidence the benefits to individuals.

² Source: Interview with NCFHE representative

10 Validation methods

10.1 Methodologies and methods

There is considerable guidance on the appropriate use of validation methodologies.

The MFHEA Validation Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Policy (MFHEA, 2022) states that all centres should ensure that any methods of assessment utilised are appropriately designed to test and recognise all the requirements set out in the National Occupational Standards.

It offers the following guidance:

- Assessment tools need to be specifically designed to capture and assess the learning achieved in different contexts.
- The individual specificity of learning outcomes concerned may require more than one tool, for example a combination of written tests, oral interviews, scenarios and practical challenges.
- Tools may include practical demonstrations, simulations or gathering of evidence from past practices and experience, among others.
- Theoretical or staged assessments must be held in the presence of invigilators that will observe and ensure that candidates undergoing the assessment are doing so on their own merit.
- Interviews or oral assessments should cover questions based on the knowledge listed and published in the NOS, using standard assessment sheets for all candidates that should be provided at the application stage
- Practical assessments are to be held when assessing skills and competencies that may only be demonstrated in person. Practical assessment record sheets are to be used to ensure that the skills are in line with the published NOS and should be provided at the application stage.
- On the job assessments may be carried out at the place of work or where a particular task can only be assessed on the job due to logistical problems that may arise in a particular sector where practical labs are not available.
- Assessments shall only be considered valid when an overarching method of assessment is used, and when the criteria listed and published in the NOS – which includes knowledge and skills – has been tested and met in conjunction with the submission of the portfolio of evidence.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines (MFHEA, 2021) sets out the procedures for institutions to ensure that learners are fully supported through the process of making an RPL claim. The procedures should describe clearly: the tools and/or the processes which will be available to enable the candidate to reflect upon their experience; the guidance and support that will be available to assist the candidate in matching their evidence with programme of study learning outcomes; the evidence which will be accepted for an RPL claim – including the agreed criteria for evidence in terms of acceptability, sufficiency, authenticity, and currency.

The specific methods of education institutions is determined by their own RPL policy. For MCAST, in addition to portfolio evidence, assessment methods are decided on an individual basis and are incorporated into an Individualised Learning Plan.

At the University of Malta, as evidence the candidate can use official transcripts accompanied by module specifications of any previous study, a reflective CV, a reference or any other verified evidence of their work to support their application in the form of a portfolio. Additional assessment methods may include an interview/oral

assessment, a project, observation and if necessary, an English test. UoM does not issue an Individualised Learning Plan but sends the candidate an official letter confirming that RPL is being offered with reference to the exact course being applied to (SCQF Partnership, 2020).

From a sector-based perspective the legal framework for the development of Sector Skills Units as defined by the amended Education Act (Government of Malta, Legal Notice 296/2012, 2012) sets out the assessment methods which will be deemed acceptable by the SSUs:

- debate or interview, where candidates demonstrate the depth of their knowledge and communication and social skills;
- declarative methods, where candidates demonstrate critical reflection, while making evidence-based statements about the competences they possess;
- observation, where candidates' behaviour is observed, which can take place either through a simulated or a real-life work scenario; or,
- tests and examinations, where candidates demonstrate, orally or in writing, their competences on a specific subject.

As previously mentioned, the 2016 Referencing Report (MFHEA, 2016) also provides some indication of methods that can be used in the stages of identification, documentation, assessment and certification. In terms of identification, as noted above, each applicant is assigned a mentor to guide them in identifying ways of gathering evidence to demonstrate the different learning outcomes that have been previously achieved. In terms of documentation, compiling evidence in the form of a portfolio is mentioned. With regards to assessment, different methods are used, including interviews, practical examinations, a written exam or any other method that the assessing board feels will help to assess whether the required learning outcomes have been achieved.

On a broader level, there is no specific information on how the application of methods takes into account the different needs of the target groups and the different purposes of validation processes in different sectors (education, labour market, third sector). Jobsplus has considered providing assistance (a reader for candidates who are unable to read) during written tests for lower-level candidates (MQF Level 2) in the building and Construction sector. There is also no specific information on how the methods are applied and how they differ or are targeted depending on the characteristics of the way learning has taken place (i.e. open educational resources).

10.2 Use of ICT in validation

The use of ICT is specific to assessment centres or education institutions. There are some notable examples.

AME is a private provider of occupational health, safety and environment courses in a range of sectors, and also a designated validation assessment centre. AME have implemented a unique and very sophisticated online assessment method, which is based on drag and drop images and multiple-choice questions. It provides assessments in a choice of 104 languages. The key benefits are that the assessment is systematic, consistent, and objective. It does not depend on the variable interpretations and possible inconsistencies between assessors. All assessments are also tracked and logged to an individual's account.

Also, MCAST has developed the infrastructure for an e-learning platform. With regards to validation, a feature of the platform is to facilitate the recognition of prior experiential learning / accreditation of prior experiential learning. Through the e-learning platform an individual can apply for previous learning acquired from work,

community or volunteer experience to be assessed and if successful to then receive credit.

11 Quality assurance

11.1 Quality assurance processes

The situation with quality assurance is largely similar to 2018. Please refer to the 2018 Inventory report for a full discussion.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – Definitions, Principles and Guidelines (MFHEA, 2021) states that a robust, consistent and quality assured approach to assessing RPL claims is key to a successful RPL process. It goes on to say that individual claims for RPL and the institutional processes for RPL should undergo the same rigorous internal and external QA processes that all other subjects, programmes of study and systems are subject to within the institution. This will help to reassure all stakeholders of the validity of RPL claims.

The MFHEA Validation Assessment Centre Quality Assurance Policy (MFHEA, 2022) promotes quality assurance because validation assessment centres are obliged to prepare and present an Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) policy based on the principles and mechanisms of VNFIL. This IQA policy is to include details on how quality assurance is maintained throughout the validation process and all related procedures. An IQA policy aims to ensure that validation assessments are carried out with transparency and fairness and that standard procedures are followed for all candidates.

MFHEA launched the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE, 2015a). This was the key deliverable of an ESF project entitled 'Making Quality Visible'. The main aim was to foster a national culture of quality in further and higher education provision.

Another key deliverable of the project 'Making Quality Visible' was the Manual of Procedures for External Quality Assurance, which set out the procedures for the implementation of external quality audits. In 2015, the first three pilot external audits were conducted with the University of Malta, MCAST and ITS.

The MFHEA has conducted several audits since 2015. The External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures of 2015, a deliverable of the ESF project, 'Making Quality Visible', was therefore being used and tested and the experience gained and the feedback from reviewers – including international QA experts that form part of review panels – and providers that has provided the MFHEA with an opportunity to build on and further enhance the Manual of Procedures of 2015. Through the Erasmus+ project 'International Cooperation for VET Providers', the MFHEA has issued a slightly revised version of the External Quality Audit Manual of Procedures which is now titled External Quality Assurance: Provider Audit Manual of Procedures (2017). Through the development of the new MoP the MFHEA has provided training for peer and students reviewers.

As part of the Erasmus+ project 'International Cooperation for VET Providers', the MFHEA has also published a 'Step-by-Step Guide to Internal Quality Assurance aimed mainly at providers that are still developing their IQA policy and those individuals who, although not expert QA professionals, are entrusted with the development and upkeep of a licensed provider's IQA documentation.

In 2017 the NCFHE updated the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education to include QA measures and mechanisms that apply specifically to institutions providing online/ blended learning.

The MFHEA remains the designated competent authority for licensing, accreditation and quality assurance of providers and programmes, including cross-border provision from Malta or in Malta. According to the 2012 regulations, providers of further and higher education are required to apply for a licence, issued by the MFHEA, to be able to operate in Malta.

- Accreditation is granted upon successful evaluation of the licensing and programme application. As per S.L 327.433 licenced providers are to undergo periodic provider and programme quality audits. The MFHEA is currently conducting External Quality Assurance: Institutional audits. These audits follow the *External Quality Assurance: Provider Audit Manual of procedures* which is based on part two of the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG) and enriched by the European Quality Assurance Reference Framework for Vocational Education and Training (EQAVET) perspective;
- The Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system is the responsibility of the provider. The MFHEA provides guidance on the writing of the internal quality assurance documentation before the provider is given a licence. Currently the MFHEA only carries out Institutional audit. The audit process is guided by the submission of the Self-Assessment Report by the provider which is followed by desk-based analysis by the panel appointed by MFHEA. The panel then carries out the audit and prepares a report with their assessment, indicating areas needing action. This is then followed-up to review changes carried out after a set period;
- Once established, the Sector Skills Units will have responsibility for Quality Assurance of the validation process in their respective sectors. At the moment since third parties carry out the validation process, MFHEA ensures that quality assurance mechanisms are in place. There will be an ongoing element to ensuring the continued relevance of skills, part of which will require employees to undergo testing after a set period of time.

The MFHEA accredits programmes of studies and institutions on the basis of level descriptors, quality assurance mechanisms and clear pathways for further training and education. National Occupational standards also determine the accreditation of specific programmes of studies. The 2012 legal notices on licensing, accreditation and quality assurance were launched. These continue to further aid the MFHEA in its mission to maintain, uphold, enhance and improve standards.

In relation to quality assurance of validation in key sectors, the Sector Skills Units have a role with regard to audit and quality. They have specific responsibilities in relation to audit of assessment processes and results achieved, and to develop and propose marks of distinction and of quality assurance in the provision of non-formal learning in their respective sector.

Evaluation framework

As reported in 2018, there is currently no evaluation framework in place for the validation process, though meetings between Assessment Board members, the Trade Testing Board and other key partners are held to discuss the validation activities and developments more broadly.

11.2 Monitoring and evaluation

There are no mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation the take up and success of validation practices.

12 The position of validation in society; visibility and trust

Validation of informal and non-formal learning is included and referred to in a number of education strategies. The Malta National Strategy for Lifelong Learning 2020 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014) stressed the need to develop and extend the current accreditation system managed by MFHEA to ensure that transparency and recognition instruments in formal education also cater for new forms of learning, in line with the Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning (European Commission, 2012).

VNFIL has become more prominent with the development of new National Occupational Standards and an increase in the number of different job roles covered by National Occupational Standards, most notably in building and construction where there are 60 different roles (MFHEA, 2023a). Five validation assessment centres in 2023 also means that VNFIL is more visible to the public.

Having assumed an executive role, as of early 2023, the National Skills Council shall be supporting Sector Skills Units (SSUs) in developing National Occupational Standards, playing a key role in VNFIL activity. Increased capacity within the National Skills Council would have likely impacted positively the promotion and spread of VNFIL.

New guidelines for education institutions on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Policy as part of their Internal Quality Assurance Policy (MFHEA, 2021) may encourage more robust processes and increase the level of trust in VNFIL and RPL. MFHEA is currently producing Guidelines for QA in Work-Based Learning (MFHEA, 2023b), which may also lead to greater trust in this area.

There is no research or evidence on the position of validation in society. With the possibility of recognition of prior learning in the main further and Higher Education institutions (University of Malta, Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, and the Institute of Tourism Studies), more individuals are gaining access to programmes of studies.

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- AME Services
- MFHEA
- National Skills Council

European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning 2023 update

This report is part of the 2023 update of the [European Inventory on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). The inventory provides a comprehensive overview of validation practices across Europe, covering 32 systems in EU-27 Member States and EFTA countries.

The European inventory is the product of a long-standing cooperation of the European Commission, Cedefop and ETF on the field. The inventory was endorsed by the [Council recommendation of 2012](#) on validation and works together with the [European guidelines](#) as a tool to support countries in developing and implementing validation arrangements.

A rich source of information, the inventory informs dialogue and learning between countries and stakeholders developing and implementing validation in Europe. Our key objective is to support Member States so that more learners and workers can acquire and make visible new skills, which will support their career and further learning and improve their quality of life.

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