An Early School Leaving Strategy for Malta

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This report identifies and analyses the main causes of early school leaving and proposes a number of measures which regulate, monitor and provide information on the successor rate of these measures.

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Preface

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Similar to the unemployment rate, the Early School Leavers rate carries a significant impact on Malta's economic growth and image when compared to other countries. The Early School Leavers rate can be described as the barometer of any educational system. It measures and provides a key indicator of the success or failure of the education system. It also gives a comparative analysis and a benchmark for reform and innovation, interventions in the education system and new approaches to attract more learners to lifelong learning.

The rate of Early School Leavers (ESL) indicates *persons between 18 and 24 years of age whose highest level of education or training is ISCED 0, 1, 2, or 3c short, and who are not in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey as a percentage of the total population of those aged 18 to 24.* In Malta statistical data dating back to 2000 always indicated a very high percentage of ESLs. In 2001 the official rate was 54% whereas the rate for 2011 showed a significant drop of 21% to 33.4%. The rate up to the third quarter of 2012 shows a further drop of another 3% indicating that Malta's target for 2020 of 29% of ESLs will be achieved by Q1 of 2013.

Wearing my hat as the former Chief Executive of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC), I was one of the first to question whether Malta's ESL rate truly reflected the reality on the ground. I provoked official talks with the National Statistics Office (NSO) on this issue way back in 2010. In 2011, we witnessed the revision of UNESCO-OECD International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) to reflect the levels of qualifications of the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Lifelong Learning. I was part of the EQF Advisory Group that discussed these changes and I am happy to note that ISCED 2011 mirrors EQF and its new descriptors are more in line with systems of education as they evolved since ISCED 1 as adopted by UNESCO's General Conference in 1997.

MQC and NSO immediately embarked on the task to reference ISCED 2011 to the Malta Qualifications Framework and to the EQF. With MQC's experience gained since 2007 of a new qualifications framework for Malta and its referencing in 2009 of the MQF to the EQF, it was possible that the two agencies (MQC and NSO) come up with a referencing process of ISCED 2011 to the MQF. NSOs experience in the field of statistics was impeccable. The direct contribution of the University of Malta and the Directorates of Education made the exercise as robust and as scientific as possible. Together we sought to understand how various countries (particularly the UK) measure ESLs. This was not an easy task at all. Although EUROSTAT provides strong guidelines for the measurement of ESLs, every country has its own complex system of education and it's even more multifaceted system of interpreting the levels of qualifications. Acquiring information from other Member States on how they measure ESLs was a strenuous task for NSO.

It took MQC and NSO as well as the Ministry of Education and Employment over two years to reach a plausible (and scientific) agreement on the interpretation of the levels and quality of qualifications within the framework of ISCED 2011. In the course of our heated discussions we realised that Malta was mapping its Ordinary Level qualifications (SEC) at a lower ISCED level when other countries such as the UK were considering their Ordinary level qualifications at ISCED 3. Secondly, anyone who does not possess any SEC qualifications but who may possess other comparable qualifications was considered as an ESL. Thirdly, our interpretation in ISCED of upper secondary education meant Sixth Form when other countries were interpreting upper secondary education as our secondary school Form IV upwards. Fourthly, in the UK any person who acquires at least 5 EGCEs (Education General Certificate) is not considered as an ESL and therefore were classified as ISCED 3 whereas in Malta prior to the re-mapping exercise, similar persons were categorised in ISCED level 2.

Inevitably, it was agreed by all parties that corrections had to be done to align Malta's interpretation of the ISCED levels to those of countries with similar or comparable systems of education.

As a result of this decision, NSO and the Ministry of Education gathered all data concerning persons in possession of Ordinary and Advanced levels of education as well as other qualifications which can be comparable to the SEC level (or ordinary level of education). The exercise was necessary to ensure that when revisiting the years prior to 2010 and 2011, the data remains consistent and any corrections of previous years is done in a scientific and verifiable way.

NSO's conclusion as published in this study (see Post Script) was that the ESL percentage rate before the re-mapping for 2010 drops from 36.9% to 24.8% and that of 2011 from 33.4% to 23.6%.

What is of paramount importance is that EUROSTAT has officially endorsed our workings and our re-mapping. In a letter sent to NSO in December 2012, EUROSTAT supported and agreed with the amendments proposed *"as this is fully compatible with the education classification used at EU level (ISCED) and improves the comparability of results across the European Union" (letter to NSO ref. ESTAT/FO/F5/EBC/CC/sk 1742202).*

The new figures show a significant decrease in the rate of ESLs from 2001 (the perceived 54% to the newly established rate of 23.6%) and from the published rates over the last ten years. Yet, Malta still needs to decrease its new rate of 23.6% to 10% in the next 12 years as set in the National Curriculum Framework (NCF) target. We are aware that the target set by the European Council for Member States is that of 10% by 2020 but is this a realistic target?

If Malta were to reach its 10% target in 2020, then the next 7 years will present one of the most ambitious goals in our education system. Personally I think that the 10% target can be achieved around 2020 and therefore setting 2025 as our realistic goal is reasonable and at the same time ambitious enough.

The real work on decreasing the ESLs rate has just started. We may have climbed a few steps up the league table but we are still very far away from claiming the title. However, we are now on the right track and on a level playing field. But we are still in a relegation zone. The inclusion in the NCF of a 10% target by 2025 is a positive, ambitious and realistic target. An important principle has been enshrined in our system of education. The ESL rate largely depends on the quality and attractiveness of compulsory education. Secondly, the NCF is an adequate tool, together with other determining factors, to ensure that learners achieve qualifications at the end of compulsory education, are inclined to further their education and training and have the skills and competences to sustain lifelong learning.

The strategy prepared by the Ministry of Education and Employment is (a) meant for consultation and decision-making, (b) as a point of reference to an understanding of the forces that impact negatively and positively the ESLs rate and (c) as a possible roadmap to prevent, intervene and compensate when signs of rejection and complacency to learning are identified in the early years. What the reader is about to experience is a qualitative research report that lays down the road to recovery, timely intervention and results.

The report is backed by NSOs declaration approved by EUROSTAT in December 2012 on the Re-Mapping of Information relating to the Rate of Early School Leavers from Education and Training. The statement by NSO illustrates in a very comprehensive manner how after almost two years of discussions the NSO and the Ministry of Education and Employment reached an agreement on how Malta's understanding and interpretation of the methodology used to measure ESLs is in line with established European standards and practices. By no stretch of the imagination should we now rely on this new approach to reach higher targets. On the contrary, the new measured data should be seen as a catalyst for a more focused approach on learning environments in compulsory education especially in the first years of schooling. The ESLs rate will quickly drop into deeper zones if we do not manage to give young learners key competences such as numeracy, literacy (Maltese and English), information and communication technology, basic science and a robust learning to learn approach.

The report lists 32 strategic actions. Each action mirrors the agreed paradigm based on prevention, intervention and compensation. Our key objective must however be to prevent and intervene and only when necessary should we resort to compensation. Adequate resources are constantly being injected into our compulsory education system. It is the rationalisation of these resources coupled with greater autonomy and self-regulating powers to the teaching grades and schools in general, that will achieve the desired results. Teachers and school managers are professional enough to contextualise learning, provide the necessary pedagogical support to students who might have fallen backwards and offer the right advice to parents on the education of their off-springs.

The NCF has set 2025 as the year in which Malta should hit the 10% (or hopefully less) target of ESLs set by the European Council. This report aims at achieving this target before 2025. I believe this to be realistic as well as ambitious but certainly a bold incentive towards more effective classroom environments, more child centred approaches in teaching and learning and more leeway to teachers to personalise contents and methods according to one's own ability and pace. Furthermore, this report besides identifying, analysing and measuring the causes of ESLs rate, also sets up a proposal for regular monitoring and reporting mechanisms on the success rate of the measures through the NCF.

I auger that this strategic roadmap coupled with NSOs, EUROSTAT and the Ministry's agreement on the re-mapping of information on ESLs provide a solid platform for dialogue among all stakeholders and a plan of action. Careful planning and systemic monitoring will certainly lift the Maltese educational system among the elite countries in Europe challenging for the title of 'excellence in education'.

Glossary

AESLB	Advisory Early School Leaving Board
CSR	Country Specific Recommendation
DES	Directorate for Educational Services
DLLL	Department for Life Long Learning
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
DSS	Department of Student Services
ESLMU	Early School Leavers Monitoring Unit
EC	European Commission
ESF	European Social Fund
ESL	Early School Leaving
ESLs	Early School Leavers
ETC	Employment and Training Corporation
EU	European Union
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
FES	Foundation for Educational Services
HALZ	High Achievers Learning Zone
HOL	Hands On Learning
KNPD	National Commission for Persons with a Disability
IY	Incredible Years
IEP	Individual Educational Programme
IMC	Inter-Ministerial Committee
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
LCAP	Leaving Certificate Applied Programme
LCVP	Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme
LSA	Learning Support Assistants
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MQC	Malta Qualifications Council
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
MQRIC	Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre
MATSEC	Matriculation Certificate Examination
MS	Member States
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NMC	National Minimum Curriculum
NRP	National Reform Programme
NSO	National Statistics Office
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PSD	Personal and Social Development
SLCP	School Leaving Certificate and Profile
SEBD	Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties
SEC	Secondary Education Certificate Examination
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SSD	Student Services Department
TIMSS	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study

Executive Summary

The strategic framework is based on the following blocks:
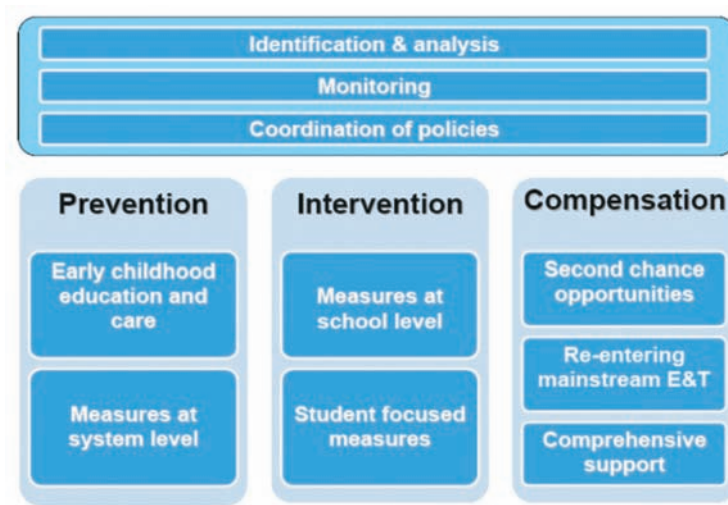
Good Practice Principles

The strategic framework builds on the following policy principles:

- Early School Leaving is a symptom of a wider range of issues affecting the lives of children, their families and their communities and the structure and content of the school system. Given the complex range of issues contributing to Early School Leaving efforts to address the issue should be sustained and based on a critical mass that allows for a coordinated collaborative holistic approach that is multi-level and includes parents, families and support networks.

- Colleges and schools, and particularly those in the State education sector, should be directed to take a proactive and supportive approach in addressing Early School Leaving and undertake all efforts including engaging stakeholders to resolve the issues with their respective school and supporting community.

- The strive to secure a multi-stakeholder approach should be supported by mobilising and resourcing parental and NGO and local community groups so that these can muster the appropriate capacity to work with students how are at risk of disengaging or disengaged from school.

- The necessary structures should be embedded in the education system, particularly within the State education sector, to allow for the early identification of pupils and students who may be struggling or underachieving in meeting the learning outcomes so that early intervention, particularly within the school itself, is embarked upon.

- The necessary structures should be in place to allow for timely and accessible responses with an emphasis of pro-activity in order to minimise the incidence of children and young people at risk of disengaging, or disengaged, from school.

- The importance of recognising that the 'academic' route to learning is not the only pathway to success and that the education system should be sufficiently flexible and balanced to allow students with varied interests, needs and abilities to embark on individualised and vocational pathways which will too lead students to success.

- The education system should be designed in a manner that will allow them to attain a form of reporting even if they drop out early of school should could form the foundation for their potential re-entry.

Strengthening the Structures to Meet the Challenge of Early School Leaving

The Report

01. Recommends that whilst the Ministry responsible for education continues to act as the lead agency given the fact that Early School Leaving transcends multiple policy domains an Inter-Ministerial Committee should be set up. The Inter-Ministerial Committee should be chaired by the Permanent Secretary responsible for education and represented by senior officials of appropriate government entities as well as NGOs, non-State schools, parents, etc. The Inter-Ministerial Committee will (i) assess and approve strategies, policies and actions directed to address the challenge of Early School Leaving; (ii) ensure that Early School Leaving and inter-related issues and proposed actions include parental, NGO and other stakeholder involvement to secure that an 'inclusive' approach is adopted as a matter of course; (iii) ensure that all government entities that have a direct or indirect role in matters relating to Early School Leaving and related issues provide unconditional support and corporation in the working of the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the implementing entities; and (iv) ensure that all government stakeholders work together in a coordinate, coherent and consistent manner in order to ensure that students are provided with a 360° support network.

02. Recommends the constitution of an Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit reporting to the Office of the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry of Education and Employment. The Unit would be responsible for ensuring an integrated systematic, sustained, cohesive and coordinated approach to the addressing of the challenge of Early School Laving.

03. Recommends the constitution of an Advisory Early School Leaving Board that will work with Colleges and Schools to assist them in determining the needs of children and young people at risk of disengaging or disengaged and to help them develop preventive measures that are specific local conditions directed to reduce referral to Learning Zones to the absolute minimum.

04. Is of the considered view that youth workers have a unique responsibility within communities to attempt to reconcile formal and non-formal education and recommends that a formal structured relationship is established between the Early School Leavers Monitoring Unit and the agency responsible for youth workers where-in the youth worker is established as the kernel around whom a collaborative holistic approach is introduced that brings together all those stakeholders who working with and around the child or young person, and very often, their family.

05. The continued development of allocation of multi-skilled resources to colleges within the State sector and to increase the speed with which this development is taking place so that colleges are able to early identify and respond to children and youths who are at risk.

06. A two tier level of financing is required to be allocated to a new programme and initiative line item within the Ministry of Education and Employment where part of the financial vote will rest with the Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit to enable it to fund prevention mechanisms that may be appropriate for implementation in more than one college or school; whilst the other part would be decentralised to a college network for administration and use across the schools resident within it and thereby allowing for locality specific Early School Leaving prevention mechanisms to be introduced.

07. Given Malta's deficit management measures, funds for localised Early School Leaving measures should be confined to those colleges, within the State education sector, operating in districts or areas that have major issues with regard to children and young people at risk who are disengaging or disengaged from school or grafted onto initiatives carried out by other stakeholders already underway thereby not only allowing for a holistic and integrated approach but through the combination of different financing resources will provide the project with a greater opportunity to render a pervasive impact.

Identification, Monitoring and Coordination

The Report

08. A two tier approach with regard to continuing to build on positive recent developments with regard to data relating to early school leaving: First, the current department responsible for research and development that supports both the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and Directorate for Educational Services is reconstituted as the Department for Research and Statistics and is repositioned to functionally report to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education. Second, the newly set-up Department for Research and Statistics should work with the NSO to introduce a robust and structured statistical methodological framework that conforms to methodological standards set by NSO and Eurostat, for the on-going collation of key data sets within the education sector. NSO's methodological framework is already defined by the regulation.

09. Recommends that given the importance of reducing the rate of Early School Leavers as performance target under the EU 2020 Strategy that the Ministry for Education and Employment seeks:

   (i) Funds under the EU 2014-2020 multi-financing framework to allow it to develop together with the National Statistics Office the statistical framework so necessary for intelligent strategy and policy design.

   (ii) Places the undertaking of specific research with regard to different aspects of the economic-social as well as externalities dynamics effecting Early School Leavers which will enable it to design and implement tailored specific policy instruments as one of the initiatives to be financed under the 2014-2020 European Social Fund.

Preventative Strategic Measures to Address Early School Leaving

The Report

10. Underlines that the removal of the streaming process at the end of the primary Cycle of education and the principle espoused in the National Curriculum Framework with regard to the institutionalisation of a differentiated teaching environment, which should be maintained and implemented, should result in a lower rate of Early School Leavers.

11. Underlines that the principles of education with regard to the continuum of achievement and learner centred learning stemming presented by the new National Curriculum Reforms are important kernels that should result in a reduction of Early School Leavers from the education system.

12. Supports the thrust in the new National Curriculum Framework that a fundamental aim of the education system should be that of ensuring that students develop the competencies, skills, attitudes and values as well as the ability to re-skill and up-skill to strengthen student's opportunities for employment and more importantly value added employment as well as labour mobility. This aim of education together with the principle of individual development pathways as well as the introduction of Vocational Educational Training in compulsory education should result in a reduction of Early School Leavers from the education system.

13. Supports the thrust in the new National Curriculum Framework that introduces an Early Years Cycle (KGI to Y2) to allow for late developers to integrate in a seamless learning outcomes framework as well as the introduction of the carrying out of individual student profiling reports at least twice annually during the said Cycle. This will enable for the structured identification of learners who may be struggling as they move into

Year 3 or as they progress within the Junior School Cycle so that the appropriate guidance and encouragement is provided to such learners at the right time and should result in a reduction of Early School Leavers from the education system.

14. Supports the thrust in the new National Curriculum Framework with regard to the importance of valuing and accrediting VET skills and competencies as a means of providing more diverse pathways of learning leading students into further and higher education as well as well as for providing the prerequisites for employability and mobility to new skills and to new jobs.

15. Recommends that in supporting the introduction of the Vocational Education Training streams in the Secondary Cycle of Education the Ministry of Education and Employment and the relevant Directorates in the said Ministry should (i) provide clear, consistent information to students, parents, teachers, schools, employers and the general public on the importance of the Vocational Education Training as a different pathway directed to allow students to develop their abilities and competencies; and (ii) provide sufficient guidelines for course providers to design Vocational Education Training courses, while allowing them enough space to innovate using their expertise.

16. Recommends that the Ministry of Education and Employment and the relevant Directorates in the said Ministry should work with stakeholders in order to identify Vocational Education Training areas that should be targeted and design a timetable for when they will be introduced. The introduction of a timetable for their introduction will help parents, guidance councillors, etc to come together and potential plan an individual pathway for pupils or students who may be at-risk of becoming an Early School Leavers.

17. Recommends that the Ministry of Education and Employment and the relevant Directorates in the said Ministry should work with stakeholders in order to identify Vocational Education Training areas that should present a case to the national and EU authorities of placing financing for design and implementation of a robust Vocational Education Training framework and programme of studies as a counter measure directed to reduce Early School Leavers and for Malta to meet the EU 2020 Strategy target on Early School Leavers.

18. Supports the development in the National Curriculum Framework that students who finish the compulsory education cycle will be provided with the Secondary School Certificate and Profile, pegged at levels 2 and 1 of the Malta Qualifications Framework, which records their formal, informal and non-formal learning that would have taken place as this provides a mechanism for the potential re-engagement of students who would have left school early but who with support mechanisms may be engaged to re-enter the education system and improve on his or her education.

19. Is of the considered opinion that the new student centred and inquiry based pedagogy espoused by the new National Curriculum Framework should reduce Early School Leavers yet for this pedagogy to be adopted by the school leaders and teaching community a systematic process of up-skilling, re-skilling and re-tooling is required. The project directed to develop a Teacher Training Centre is considered to be a positive step in this regard.

20. Is of the considered opinion that the use and application of e-Learning based on interactive e-Content will render learning more enjoyable and therefore help to reduce the number of early school leavers. The project directed to develop an e-Learning Centre is considered to be a positive step in this regard.

Intervention Measures to Address Early School Leaving

21 The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should review comprehensive structured programmes currently in place for Early Years and Junior school students which are directed at bringing the school, the parents and the teachers to promote social, emotional and academic competence and to prevent children and youths from developing conduct problems that would later increase the incidence of their dropping out of school. The purpose of the review would be to ensure that current interventions are effective in targeting and addressing children most at risk of educational underachievement and leaving school without qualifications, and address their academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs.

22. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit works with the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education within the Ministry for Education and Employment to conduct an in-depth review on the potential introduction of a creative construction projects pathway in the primary Cycle of education as a means to reengaging disengaged and at-risk students between the age of 7 to 10 years.

23. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit works with the Kunsill Nazzjonali ghall Persuni B'Dizabilta, Agenzija Support and other stakeholders to review current support programmes across compulsory education as well as higher and tertiary education with a view to increase the percentage of disabled persons who obtain accreditation and certification. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Prevention Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to meeting the needs of disabled persons.

24. The report supports the planning currently underway to create a High Achievers Learners Zone. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Meeting the Needs of High Achievers.

25. The report supports the measures introduced in the new National Curriculum Framework with regard to establishing diversity as both a principle of education as well as a cross curricular theme. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Meeting the Needs of Students from Minority Groups.

26. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should work with college networks and other support services within the Ministry of Education and Employment to the transition programmes in place today directed to enable students to adjust as they move from one Cycle of education to the other. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Prevention Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Transition Programmes from Primary to Secondary Schools.

27. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should carry out a study across the State, Church and Independent school sectors to assess the type of mentoring schemes in place, identify best practice examples, and design and promulgate policies and handbooks for the introduction of such mentoring schemes at a college and / or school level.

28. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should work with college networks and Guidance and Counselling Officers there in to initiate career orientation and guidance programmes from Form I (Year 7) of the Secondary cycle of education so that students are better informed with regard to the subject choices they will be asked to make at the end of Form II (Year 8).

29. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should carry out a study across the State, Church and Independent school sectors to assess the type of community partnership schemes in place, identify best practice examples, and design and promulgate policies and handbooks for the introduction of such community partnership schemes at a college and / or school level.

30. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should carry out a comprehensive review with regard to the performance of the Learning Support Zones and Nurture Groups in order to assess how they are positively affecting the social, emotional and academic competence of as well as enabling children to re-integrate successfully in mainstream education.

Compensation Measures to Address Early School Leaving

31. The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Prevention Unit works with the Ministry of Education and Employment, the Employment and Training Corporation, the Malta Council for Science, Arts and Technology and other stakeholders to review 'second chance' and 're-integration' programmes to assure that they are meeting the objectives for which they have been set and that there is no unnecessarily overlap between the various programmes underway. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Prevention Unit should assess the 8 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Compensation Measures.

Measuring the Success of the Early School Leaving Strategy

32. The report recommends that the strategy is assessed on the basis of the following three outcomes:

(I) Literacy.
(ii) Engagement.
(iii) Transition.

Each of these outcomes is supported by a number of outputs which are presented in the main body of the report.

The Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit will work with the proposed Department of Research and Statistics to identify and ensure the implementation of the necessary procedures for the collection of data for the measurement of each output from sources ranging from formal structured data collection to the holding of focus groups are introduced.

Terms of Reference

The Office of the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE)in the last quarter of 2012 embarked on a process leading to the design a comprehensive strategy on Early School Leaving (ESL). The strategy is designed on the basis of Council Recommendation 2011/C191/01 titled 'On policies to reduce early school leaving' dated 28th June 2011 which establishes the following key points[1]:

• Identification of main factors and monitoring.

• Policy framework.

In the carrying out of the work leading to the design of this strategy the Permanent Secretary requested the drafters to analyse the following aspects in relation to the subject matter: roots; state of play; provisions for training; the link between early school leaving and the labour market; recommendations to reduce the rate of early school leavers.

Methodology

In the carrying of this strategic framework document, the drafters adopted the following methodology:

• Review of the European Council and the European Commission (EC) statements and documentation with regard to early school leaving (ESL) with regard to the European Union (EU) generally and Malta specifically.

• Review of the state of play with regard to ESL in Malta and measures carried out to date.

• Review of literature on ESL prevention, intervention, and compensation measures with regard to ESL with specific reference to Malta and to the EU.

• Review of forward looking measures adopted by the Government of Malta with regard to ESL.

• Review of other national strategies that may have an impact on the policy framework with regard to ESL

For the purpose of this document, ESL is defined as a failure by a person to complete upper secondary school, a failure to complete compulsory schooling or a failure to gain qualifications or school leaving certificates. At EU level ESL rates are defined by the proportion of the population aged 18-24 years of age with only lower secondary education or less and no longer in education or training.[2]

ESLs are therefore those persons who have only achieved pre-primary, primary, lower secondary or a short upper secondary education of less than 2 years, and include those who have only a pre-vocational or vocational education which did not lead to an upper secondary certification. Thus, the term "early school leaving" includes all forms of leaving education and training before completing upper secondary education or equivalents in vocational education and training. Where applied, the term "school drop-out" is used with a much more restricted meaning: it refers to discontinuing an on-going course in general or vocational education and training.[3]

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1   Council Recommendation of 28th June 2011 on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving (2011/C191/01): http://eur-lex.europa.eu/ LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=OJ:C:2011:191:0001:0006:en:PDF
2   Council conclusions on "Reference levels of European Average Performance in Education and Training (Benchmarks)", May 2003. The OECD defines early school leavers as 20-24 year olds with education below upper secondary level
3   Commission Staff Working Paper, Reducing Early School Leaving, SEC (2010), http://ec.europa.eu/education/ school- education/doc/ earlywp_en.pdf

Limitations

The preparation of this document was constrained by the absence of a robust corpus of research on ESL in Malta as well as detailed information on the background of ESLs and an analysis of the causes and incidence of ESL. It is pertinent to underline, that this is not a limitation that is present only in Malta though the EC underlines Ireland, France, Hungary, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom as "positive" examples to follow.[4]

Acknowledgments

The drafting team thanks the Permanent Secretary and stakeholders within as well as outside of MEDE for the assistance they provided in the design of this strategic document as well as with persons who were ready to share their thoughts with regard to underlying issues and potential remedies vis-a-vis ESL.

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4   Europe 2020 Target: Early School Leaving; http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes /21_early_school_leaving.pdf

01
Early School Leaving in Malta

01. Early School Leaving in Malta

01.1 Explaining Early School Leaving

Research in Malta with regard to why students leave early from education and training is, as stated in the introductory chapter, limited. The section below makes reference to Maltese research on this important policy issue.

This section, in the absence of a robust corpus of a local research base and information, presents a high level review of international research. The following are key characteristics that lead to ESL classified over three categories:

(a)   The Education System and the Labour Market

These included but are not limited to the following:

(i)   **Compulsory Age of Education**: AGHK research study concluded that although the length of compulsory education shows a statistically significant correlation with the rate of ESL a wide variety of factors, together with compulsory age, have an influence on ESL.[5]

(ii)   **Pupil-Teacher Ratio and Class Size**: Even though pupil-teacher ratio and class size show no statistical significant effect on the rate of ESL it is suggested by the literature that these variables might have an impact on ESL in countries where attention is paid to adjusting the pupil-teacher ratio and class size according to students' abilities and disadvantages.[6]

(iii)   **Repetition of Classes**: The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2003 results as well as other research suggests that students who repeat classes tend to perform worse and might even drop out more easily because of a lack of motivation.[7]

(iv)   **Labour Market Conditions on ESL**: Literature suggests that the availability of jobs for low-skilled persons might be a disincentive in some countries to stay longer in school.[8]

(b)   Individual Characteristics

These include but are not limited to the following:

(i)   **Demographic**: People with a migration background are at greater risk of dropping out from school (with the exception of the UK and Portugal). In 2011 the ESL rate of young people born abroad was on average double the ESL rate of natives (24.9% compared to 12.4%). The data available, presented in the Section below, also shows that ESL is significantly higher for boys than for girls – which applies for almost all Member States (MS) (with the exception of Bulgaria).[9]

(ii)   **Cognitive Abilities**: Early school leavers may be less intelligent and perform less well in school compared to other students.[10] Cognitive abilities, however, are not the only thing that distinguishes dropouts from non-dropouts. ESLs show a lack of aspirations as well as motivation.[11]

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5   Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills, and Early School Leavers, Lot 3: Early School Leavers, Final Report submitted by GHK to the European Commission, September 2005
6   Ibid
7   Ibid
8   Ibid
9   Europe 2020 Target: Early School Leaving http://ec.europa.eu /europe2020 /pdf/themes /21_early_school_leaving.pdf
10   Alexander, Karl, Entwisle, Doris and Nader Kabbani. 2001. The dropout process in life course perspective: early risk factors at home and school. Teachers College Record 103: 760-822
11   Traag, T., and Van der Velden, K. W. R., Early School Leaving in the Netherlands, Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Maastricht Univeristy, 2008, http://www.roa.unimaas.nl/pdf_publications/2008/ROA_RM_2008_3.pdf

(iii) **Students who come from Vulnerable Groups**: Students who come from vulnerable groups, such as the "Looked After", the disabled, those with Special Educational Needs (SEN), and those with physical health problems are likely to be ESLs or are withdrawn from school by their parents.[12]   Additionally, children and young people experiencing mental health issues or having a parent with a mental illness are at risk of disengaging from school.

(iv) **High Achievers**: One of the reasons of students dropping out of school is that potential high flyer students lose interest as they are not sufficient challenged to retain interest. The long term benefits of exploiting the talents of High Achievers is not easily quantifiable but successfully nurturing them should not only ensure that they are not disenchanted with the education system and continue to higher education but will also help to channel their skills to the benefit of the country as a whole. Statistics quoted in Time magazine have shown that gifted students drop out of school at the same rate as non-gifted children.

(v) **Young Mothers**: Young mothers are at risk of disengagement from school and often find it difficult to attend schooling due to the demands of caring for their child and the inflexibility of the school curriculum and setting. Continued education at both pre and post pregnancy is critical in ensuring young mothers are supported to participate in and access future life opportunities. For young mothers and pregnant teens to maintain engagement in education, the environment must be welcoming and supportive, delivered within a curriculum that is tailored to their learning needs, supported with child-care arrangements, and providing a flexible timetable and learning environment.

Figure 01:   Factors that may lead to Early School Leaving[13]

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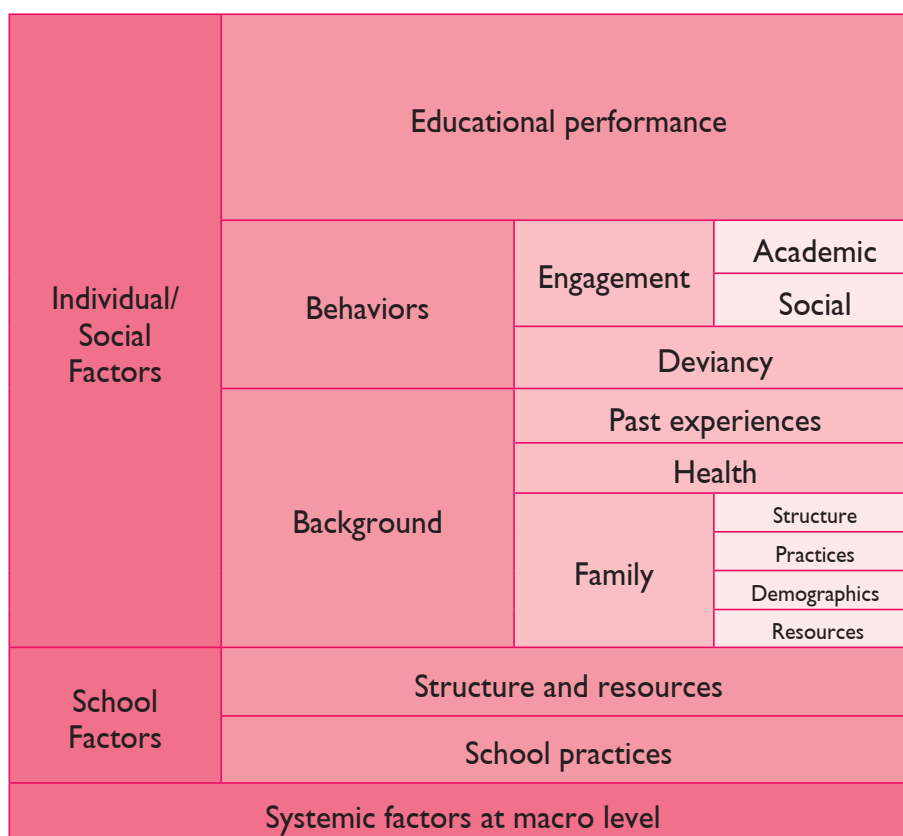
12   Early School Leaving: Lessons from Research for Policy Makers, Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training, Independent expert Report to the European Commission, 2010

13   Lyche, S., C., Taking on the Completion Challenge: A Literature Review on Policies to Prevent Dropout and Early School Leaving, OECD Education Working Papers, No 53, OECD Publishing, 2010, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5km4m2t59cmr-en

(c)   Family Related Factors

These include but are not limited to the following:

(i)   **Economic Status of a Student's Family**: Financial pressures on poorer households can put pressure on students to leave education early in order to enter the labour market. Children of non-employed parents will have lower amounts of financial resources and therefore are more prone to leave school early than children of high-skilled professionals.[14] Conversely, research shows that students coming from higher income families are more likely to be successful in education.[15]

(ii)   **Human Capital of a Student's Family**: The human capital of the family is measured by the educational level of the parents and constitutes the extent to which the student grows up in a cognitive stimulating environment. High educated parents are better able to help their child – for example when doing homework. Families where the parents are higher educated are more likely to have greater knowledge of the school system and to view higher education as the preferred destiny for their children.[16]

(iii)   **Cultural Capital of a Student's Family**:   Cultural capital is an important factor in explaining inter-generational transmission of inequality. Children from parents with high levels of cultural capital are better able to adjust to the dominant culture in schools than children from parents with less cultural capital; irrespective of their cognitive skills.[17]

(iv)   **Social Capital of a Student's Family**:   The social capital in the family concerns among others the relationship between parents and children. Children from single-parent families have less social interaction, because only one parent is available. This is also true for children in large families, where children need to share their interaction-time with other siblings. This means that children from either single-parent families or children from large families can take less advantage of their parents' resources, increasing the probability of leaving school early.[18]

01.2   The Impact of Early School Leaving

Academic literature has long confirmed the conventional theory that sustained engagement in high quality education is directly related to the realisation of positive life outcomes for individuals and societies and that education has a key role to play in the acquisition of social capital and of access to career opportunities and life chances.[19] The consequences of ESL relate, therefore, to failure to access these life chances and social exclusion[20].

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14   Lamb, Stephen. 1994. Dropping out of school in Australia: Recent trends in participation and outcomes. Youth and Society 26(2): 194-222

15   O'Brien, Maeve. 2003. Girls and transition to second-level schooling in Ireland: 'Moving on' and 'moving out'. Gender and Education 15(3): 249-267

16   Traag, T., and Van der Velden, K. W. R., Early School Leaving in the Netherlands, Research Centre for Education and the Labour Market, Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Maastricht Univeristy, 2008, http://www.roa.unimaas.nl/pdf_ publications/2008/ROA_RM_2008_3.pdf

17   De Graaf, Nan Dirk and Paul M. De Graaf. 2002. Formal and popular dimensions of cultural capital: Effects on children's educational attainment. The Netherlands' Journal of Social Sciences 38(2): 167-186

18   Heard, Holly E. 2004. The life course of family structure and adolescent school achievement: Racial and ethnic differences. Paper presented at the Population Association of America 2004 meeting, Boston

19   Includes Johnston, G (2004) 'Healthy, wealthy and wise? A review of the wider benefits of education, New Zealand Treasury, working paper 04/04; Levin H (2010), Why should countries care? The high economic and social costs of education failure, presented to the OECD, 11 February 2010; Lochner L and Moretti E (2004) The effect of education on crime: evidence from prison inmates, arrests and self-reports, American Economic Review, vol. 94, pp. 155–89; Hannusek and Woessman (2010) The high cost of low educational performance: the long-run economic impact of improving PISA outcomes, OECD, Paris

20   Cullen, B. (2000) Evaluating Integrated Responses to Educational Disadvantage, Dublin: Combat Poverty Agency

Studies find that young people who do not complete school or gain equivalent education and training are more likely to become unemployed, stay unemployed for extended periods of time, earn lower wages and accumulate a lower level of wealth across the span of their lives.[21] The Figure below shows, by school completion status, the proportion of people in 2010 in Australia who were employed and consistently, across all age groups, those who completed year 12 (or its equivalent) exhibited higher rates of employment than those who did not.[22]

Figure 02:   Proportion of People who were employed by Year 12 Attainment and Age: 2010 (Australia)
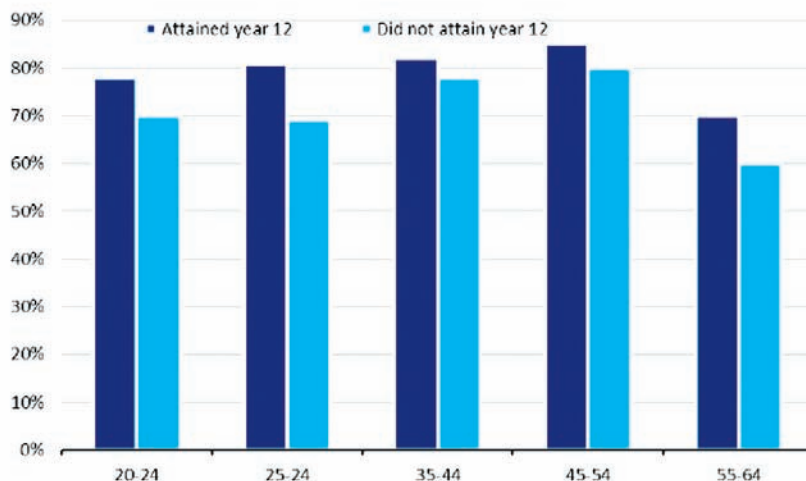
Findings from a number of studies on the relationship between labour market earnings and initial education conclude that an additional year of schooling is likely to yield an increased annual 'rate of return' for individuals. They are more likely, thus, to become involved in low paid, low status work and according to US figures, earn just 65% of the average US salary.[23]

In Australia, as seen in the Figure below, comparing the weekly income of those who are in the workforce (aged 20-64 shows that those who attained year 12 earn, on average, a higher level of income. The difference is most stark at the extremes. Of those in the highest income quintile, 70% had completed schooling, while only 30% had not. In Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, other things being equal, the earnings of employees with a higher education were between 48% and 59% more than those with a secondary education, and between 69% and 80% more than those with a basic education.[24] One estimate is that in Europe, in financial terms, it has been calculated that the additional lifetime income for a student who stayed at school for an extra year was more than €70.000.[25]

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21   Rumberger, R and Lamb, S (2003) The Early employment and further education experiences of high school dropouts: a comparative study of the United States and Australia. Economics of Education Review, 22(4), 553-556

22   The Socio Economic Benefits of Investing in the Prevention of Early School Leaving, Deloitte, September 2012 http://handsonlearning. org.au/DAE_investing_in_preventing_ESL_via_HOL_ September_2012.pdf

23   Bradshaw, C., O'Brennan, L. M., and McNeely, C., Core competencies and the prevention of school failure and early school leaving. In N. G. Guerra and C. P. Bradshaw (Eds). Core competencies to prevent problem behaviours and promote positive youth development. New directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 122, 2008

24   Hazans, M, Returns to Education in the Baltic Countries, 2003

25   Pg 32, Early School Leaving: Lessons from research for policy makers, Independent expert report submitted to the European Commission, Network of Experts in Social Sciences of Education and Training, http://www.spd.dcu.ie/site/edc/documents/nesse2010early-school-leaving-report.pdf

Figure 03: **Personal Gross Weekly Income from all Sources for 20-64 years old by Year 12 Attainment - 2009 (Australia)**
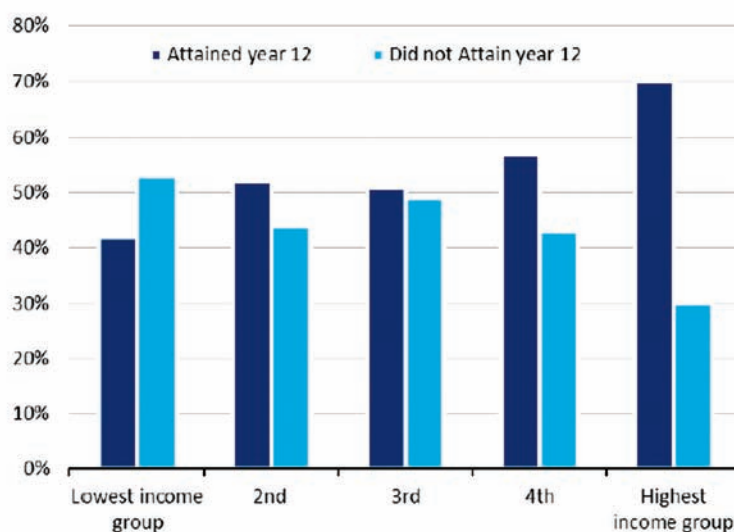
ESLs have lower levels of general health, report more anxiety and depression and have a higher mortality rate.[26] This in turn can result in poor labour market outcomes and affect family relationships, child development and other social outcomes, so these impacts have a reinforcing nature which can lead to entrenched disadvantage. School completion affects risky health behaviours. For instance, in 2004 the prevalence of smoking among Australian adults was 30% for people who had completed Years 10 or 11, but only 21% for people whose highest level of formal education was Year 12 or post-secondary qualifications, while it was only 11% for people who had attended university.[27] People with less education (having left full-time schooling before age 16) or who are unemployed are also more at risk for common mental health problems, obesity as well as increased alcohol consumption.[28]

Moreover, there are also social losses associated with early departure from a system which instils civic and social responsibility. Young people with insufficient education and/or poor literacy skills are disproportionately found within the criminal justice system. Wolfe and Haveman (2002) cite a number of studies showing that schooling is associated with reduced criminal activities and that engagement in formal education is associated with a reduction in recidivism.[29]

Data, in Australia, indicates that prisoners have a lower level of educational attainment than the general Australian population. In 2006, almost two-thirds of the general population aged 25–34 years had completed Year 12, compared with just 14% of prison entrants in that age group. More than one-third of prison entrants (36–37%) had a highest completed level of schooling of Year 9 or less, compared with around one in twenty (4–8%) of the general population.[30] In Ireland[31] the committal rate for males is considerably higher for early school leavers (46.6 out of 1,000) compared with those who achieve the Leaving Certificate (1.6 out of 1) whilst in the Netherlands it has been calculated that 27% of early school leavers were suspected of a crime in comparison to 7% of non-school leavers132. It has consequently been estimated that a reduction in ESLs of 15s000 young people between 2006 and 2011 would save the government around €9 million per year.[32]

26   Barnardos, Written out, written off, Dublin, Barnardos, 2009
27   Scollo, MM and Winstanley, MH (2008) Tobacco in Australia: Facts and Issues. Cancer Council Victoria
28   Fryers T, Melzer D, Jenkins R, Brugha T (2005) The distribution of mental disorders: social inequalities in Europe, Clinical Practice & Epidemiology in Mental Health 1:14. http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC1242241/
29   Wolfe BL, Haveman RH (2002) Social and Nonmarket Benefits from Education in an Advanced Economy, Federal Reserve Bank of Boston
30   The Socio Economic Benefits of Investing in the Prevention of Early School Leaving, Deloitte, September 2012 http://handsonlearning. org.au/DAE_investing_in_preventing_ESL_via_HOL_ September_2012.pdf
31   Smyth, E. and McCoy, S. (2009), Investing in Education: Combating Educational Disadvantage, Economic and Social Research Institute, Dublin, 2009
32   Ministry of Education, Culture and Science (2010), The approach to school drop-out: Policy in the Netherlands and the provisional figures of the 2008-2009 performance agreements

ESL also carries very high costs for national economies. One calculation based the assumption that ESL have 6% lower productivity than qualified leavers, and using the 2005 figure of 23% unqualified leavers, suggests that ESL cost the European economy a productivity loss of 1.4%.[33]

Additionally, at a societal level, there is also a significant cost incurred by the State as a result of the fact that ESLs are more likely to be unemployed, to be claiming unemployment benefits or assistance and to experience personal and social problems.[34] The pool of skilled works is also reduced, which has consequences for the State's ability to compete economically.[35] The global estimate for the average gross cost over the life time of one 18-year-old who does not complete high school of approximately €350,000.[36]

On the other hand, effective measures directed to prevent ESL result in economic benefits. In the Netherlands, a study undertaken by Ecorys reveals the potential savings that can be made by reducing ESL. This research is based on the assumption that ESLs could be reduced by 15,000 individuals: from 50,000 early school leavers in 2006 to 35,000 in 2011. The study concluded that the savings for the State made over the five-year period reviewed could reach nearly €3.7 billion in total, with some 38% deriving from additional taxations, 12% from reduced subsidies, 1.4% from less criminal activity and 0.5% from better health.[37]

Figure 04: **Potential Savings from the Reduction of Early School Leavers in the Netherlands (€m)[38]**

Year	06/07	07/08	08/09	09/10	10/11
Amount	634	720	689	738	909

Source of savings (2006)			
Type	**Beneficiary**	**EUR (million)**	**% of savings**
Private gain	ESL	307	48.3 %
Additional tax	Government	242	38.1 %
Less subsidies	Government	75	11.8 %
Better health	Government	3	0.5 %
Less criminality	Government	9	1.4 %

01.3 The Socio-Economic Context within which the Educational System Operates

01.3.1 Malta's Educational System Explained

The Constitution of the Republic of Malta and the Education Act (CAP 327) provide the constitutional and legal framework and the main aims for the Maltese Educational System. The Education Act acknowledges the right of every citizen of Malta to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, belief or economic means.

The Education Act which was enacted in 1988 has undergone a number of amendments over the years to reflect the developments in national education. Chronologically, the latest major amendments took place in 2006 by

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33 European Commission (2006), Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament: Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training systems SEC(2006) 1096} Brussels, 8.9.2006
34 Barnardos, Written out, written off, Dublin, Barnardos, 2009
35 Combat Poverty Agency, Educational Disadvantage in Ireland, Dublin, Combat Poverty Agency, 2003
36. European Commission (2006), Communication from the Commission to the Council and to the European Parliament: Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training systems SEC(2006) 1096} Brussels, 8.9.2006
37 Neval, A., M., Hawley, J., et al Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU – A Study, Produced for the Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Education and Culture by GHK Consulting Ltd
38 Ibid

means of Act XIII. These amendments laid the groundwork for the implementation of a major reform in Maltese education. The reform included the change in role of the central education authority (the Education Division) from a provider of education to a regulator of education.

Two directorates were established; the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Directorate for Educational Services (DES). For the first time, quality assurance and the setting of standards were given a central position and a legislative framework. The Act also provided for a decentralisation process by which decisions which were previously taken at central level could now be taken at management levels closer to the schools.

In this regard, the Act also established the College Networks whereby schools were grouped into Colleges. The Act states that it is the duty of the State to promote education and instruction, to ensure the existence of a system of schools and institutions accessible to all Maltese citizens catering for the full development of the whole personality including the ability of every person to work and to provide for such schools and institutions where these do not exist.

Currently, it is the right of the State to establish a national minimum curriculum of studies for all schools, to establish the national minimum conditions for all schools and to secure compliance with the national minimum curriculum of studies and the national minimum conditions for all schools.

State education is free of charge from pre-primary up to tertiary level. Within the compulsory school age (5 to 16 years) children attending State education are provided with free textbooks and school transport. The non-state education sector is sub-divided into Church schools and Independent private schools. There are 104 such schools, 79 of which are Church schools. This number is set to rise in the coming years as more Church schools intend to expand their physical facilities with the help of State funding. Currently 30% of all children in Malta are educated in the non-state school sector, mainly Roman Catholic schools which are heavily subsidised by the government and charge no fees. There are also two International Schools. Independent schools are set up by individuals or non-profit parents' foundations. The government gives tax rebates to parents whose children attend these schools.[39]

Pre-primary education caters for children aged 2 years nine months to 4 years 9 months. In the State sector kindergarten education takes place in kindergarten centres that are attached to primary schools; in the non-state sector many kindergarten are stand-alone entities. Although kindergartens do not fall within compulsory education about 98% of the age cohort (4-year olds) attend these centres.

This level of education is considered as an integral part of a child's education and is provided free in all State and Church schools. Pre-primary education is also provided within the Independent sector, but parents opting to send their children to these schools pay tuition fees. Prior to age 3 children may attend child day-care centres.[40] Pre-primary level education is the responsibility of kindergarten assistants.

Everyone between the ages of 5 and 16 is entitled to free education in all State schools. Primary education is co-educational in all State schools and in some non-state schools. This is part of compulsory education and includes six years of schooling starting from age 5. Generally the children joining a primary class would have already attended kindergarten within the same school which is usually found in the area/locality.

Primary education is free of charge in State Schools and includes school transport and textbooks. Primary, secondary and post-secondary education is the responsibility of teachers having a good academic and pedagogical grounding. The Table below presents the number of education practitioners in State, Church and Independent schools engaged in the three cycles of compulsory education as at November 2011.

39   National System Overview on Education Systems in Europe, 2011 Edition, EURYDICE, European Commission
40   Ibid

Table 01:   Total Number of Education Practitioners[41]

Table 4: Total number of education practitioners as at November, 2011		Head of School	Assistant Head of School	Head of Department	Teacher	Kindergarten Assistant	LSA	Others *	Total
State Schools Sector	Kindergarten	0	0	0	0	440	139	0	579
	Primary	59	136	1	809	0	645	5	1655
	Secondary	27	109	78	1897	24	583	0	2718
	Upper Secondary	2	6	10	235	0	9	0	262
	Total	88	251	89	2941	464	1376	5	5214
Church Schools Sector	Kindergarten	1	1	0	45	47	31	0	125
	Primary	14	31	0	336	0	237	0	618
	Secondary	16	35	21	700	0	246	0	1018
	Upper Secondary	1	2	0	25	0	2	0	30
	Total	32	69	21	1106	47	516	0	1791
Independent Schools Sector	Kindergarten	4	0	0	0	102	4	0	110
	Primary	9	32	1	182	0	32	0	256
	Secondary	9	2	3	226	0	23	0	263
	Upper Secondary	1	1	0	7	0	0	0	9
	Total	23	35	4	415	102	59	0	638
Grand total		143	355	114	4462	613	1951	5	7643

On completion of Form 5, marking the end of compulsory secondary education, students may sit for the Secondary Education Certificate Examination (SEC). Successful candidates may choose to continue into the post-secondary academic route or enter into the labour market. Vocational education may take the form of apprenticeships, (which are part-time studies and part-time training on-the-job); as well as studies at different vocational institutions in Malta, such as the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) or the Malta Centre for Restoration.

The post-secondary academic route, known as Sixth Form, lasts for two years. Upon completion students may take the Matriculation Certificate Examination (MATSEC) to progress to higher education. The figure below outlines the Maltese education system from primary to higher education. It also explains the different entry and transition requirements to specific stages of the education system.[42]

Figure 05:   Malta's Education System[43]

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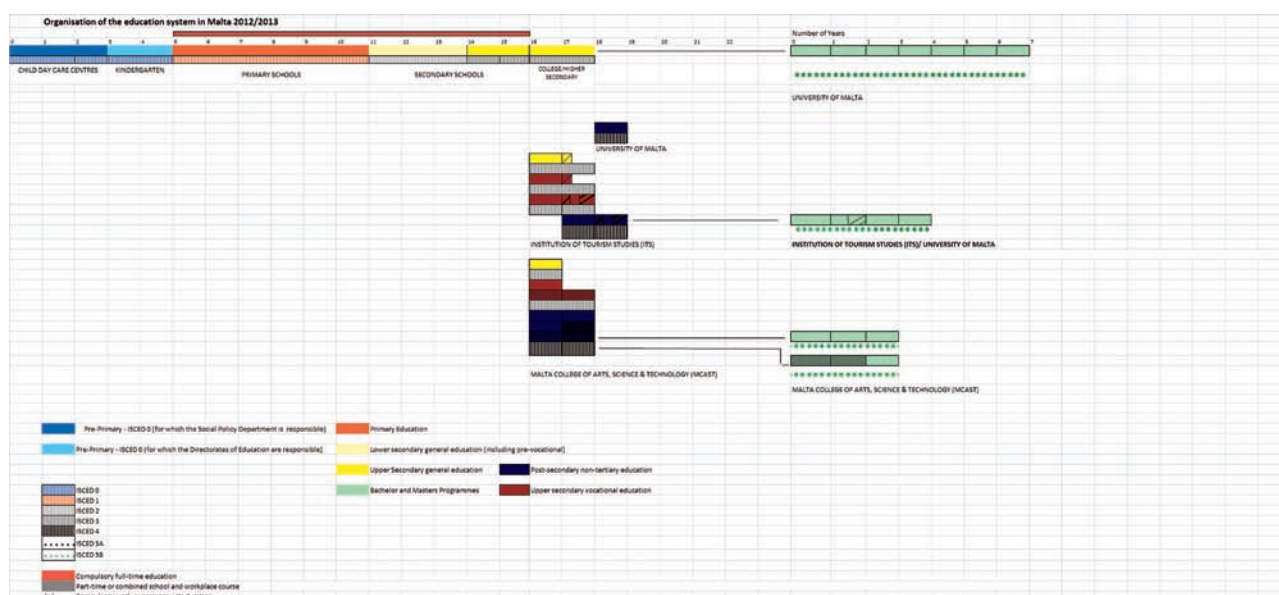
41   Analysis of Feedback to the Consultation Process on the Draft National Curriculum Framework, Final Report, Ministry of Education and Employment, August 2012

42   What Do You Want to Be? Student Guide for Further and Higher Education in Malta, National Commission for Higher Education, November 2009

43   The Structure of the European Education Systems 2012 / 13: Schematic Diagrams, Eurydice, European Commission, http://eacea. ec.europa.eu/education/ eurydice/facts_and _figures_en.php#diagrams

The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) is responsible for this framework and for mapping all qualifications to the different levels. Another centre, the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (MQRIC), is responsible for referencing all foreign qualifications to these levels. This framework allows students and their families to better understand the different levels of qualifications in an education system or how they can progress in that system whilst employers peg the qualifications to the different levels to be able to gauge the level of educational development achieved by a person applying for a job.[44]

Figure 06:   Qualifications Offered by the Malta Qualifications Framework Level[45]

Institution	Higher Secondary and Sixth Forms	MCAST	ITS	University of Malta
Level 2		Foundation Certificate	Foundation Certificate	
Level 3	Secondary Education Certificate (revision courses)	VET First Diploma; VET Certificate	VET Certificate	
Level 4	Matriculation Certificate, International Baccalaureate	VET Diploma; VET Certificate	VET Diploma	
Level 5		VET Higher National Diploma	VET Higher National Diploma	Undergraduate Diploma/Certificate
Level 6		Bachelor		Bachelor
Level 7				Postgraduate Certificate; Postgraduate Diploma; Masters
Level 8				Doctorate

It is, however, important to underline, that the Government has introduced a comprehensive funding framework that is directed to assist students following both higher and further education. The funding framework, which, as shown in the Figure below, embraces general education, vocational education and training, higher education as well as international studies constitutes an important incentive constructed, at a significant recurrent expenditure, to spur students to continue with post compulsory education studies.

It is pertinent to note, that unlike most MS, the funding framework for further and higher education is not means tested and is available to all students. Thus, students are not only able to purchase the necessary resources that are so important vis-à-vis this level of studying but also affords them the opportunity that they do not have to depend on their parents' income levels to be able to pursue further studies.

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44   Ibid
45   Ibid

Figure 07: **Funding Schemes available per level of the Malta Qualifications Framework[46]**

Funding scheme	Further Education in Malta		Higher Education in Malta	International studies
	General Education	Vocational Education and Training		
Student Maintenance Grants	✔	✔	✔	✔ •
ESTS		✔		
TAS		✔		
My Potential		✔	✔	
Training Subsidy Scheme	✔	✔	✔	✔
Training Aid Framework	✔	✔	✔	✔
Malta Government Scholarship Scheme - Undergraduate			✔	✔
Malta Government Scholarship Scheme - Postgraduate			✔	✔
Strategic Pathways Scholarship			✔	✔
Career Guidance Capacity Building Scholarship			✔	✔
Youth Specialisation Studies Scheme				✔
Leonardo da Vinci Programme				✔
Erasmus Programme				✔
Erasmus Mundus Programme				✔

01.3.2 Absenteeism

In 2005, MEDE published a report of a School Attendance Improvement Taskforce Review - titled 'School Attendance Improvement'. The report underlined that absenteeism is a complex problem and is not merely limited to the lack of school attendance. Rather the problem of absenteeism can affect the continuity of instruction and can disrupt students' learning as having the potential to affect the student throughout his or her life given that students with a high level of absenteeism or truancy have a higher incidence of becoming ESLs.[47]

It is pertinent to underline that there is a strong correlation between attendance and school performance. For example, the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) 2007 showed that the average achievement in science was influenced by the rate of absenteeism since Maltese students who performed at a high level on the index of good attendance achieved higher in average science achievement when compared to those who achieved at a medium or low level on the same index.[48]

The afore-mentioned review submitted policy recommendations as well as short and long term strategies which included setting attendance targets; addressing dubious medical certificates; and service development aimed at students, educational institutions, the directorates in MEDE, families staff development and the curriculum amongst others.[49]

At the time the cited report was written streaming was still in place. The report recommended the setting of a target of 92% attendance for all Junior Lyceums (attendance rate at the time being90.58%), a target of 85% for all area secondary schools (attendance rate at the time being78.59%) and a target of 75% for all girls' and boys' schools (previously opportunity centres- attendance rate at the time being65.76%) to be achieved by the scholastic year starting in 2007. With regard to primary schools it proposed a general target of 95% attendance to be achieved by the end of the academic year 2007-2008.[50]

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46 Guide to Financial Support Schemes for Maltese Students in Further and Higher Education, National Commission for Higher Education, https://www.nche.gov.mt/MediaCenter/PDFs/1_NCHE%20 scholarship%20booklet_web.pdf
47 Clark, M;, Borg, S., Calleja, G., Chircop, F., and Portelli, R., School Attendance Improvement, Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment, October, 2005, https://www.education.gov.mt/MediaCenter/Docs/1_school_attendance_improvement.pdf
48 http://www.masemalta.com/oldsite/news/Executive%20Summary.pdf
49 Ibid
50 Ibid

The figure below shows the latest statistics issued by National Statistics Office (NSO) with regard to the level of absenteeism by year of study, level of education and sector. As can be seen, absenteeism between the scholastic years 2006 / 2007 and 2007/ 2008 fell both within State schools and as well across all sectors. With regard to absenteeism in primary schools this fell by 8,389 – or 5.5% - in State schools or 16,951 across all school sectors – or 7.9%. In the secondary Cycle of education, the level of absenteeism in State schools fell by 59,752 – or 18.5% and across all school sectors by 68,895 or by 18.1%.[51]

The average absenteeism per enrolled study for children in State primary schools remained constant at 8.9 over the periods under review, whilst those relating to State secondary schools fell from an average rate of 18.7 to 16.2. With regard to students in secondary schools across all sectors the average rate fell from 13.9 to 11.9.[52]

Table 02:   **Absenteeism by Year of Study, Level of Education and Sector**[53]

	2006/2007		2007/2008	
	State	All Sectors	State	All Sectors
Year 1	23,876	36,219	24,733	36,114
Year 2	26,210	37,042	21,659	30,931
Year 3	23,814	33,596	23,276	31,804
Year 4	22,624	32,093	21,999	29,839
Year 5	25,257	34,227	23.016	30,532
Year 6	26,971	36,264	25,909	33,499
Year 7	3,293	3,293	3,064	3,064
Total	152,045	212,734	143,656	195,783
Form 1	44,303	53,873	31,575	38,290
Form 2	53,552	63,190	39,737	47,198
Form 3	57,993	68,530	47,091	55,622
Form 4	74,820	86,408	58,473	70,091
Form 5	93,066	107,656	87,106	99,561
Total	323,734	379,657	263,982	310,762

Of particular note, the highest levels of authorised absences in the primary and secondary Cycles of education during the 2006-2007 scholastic took place in the Northern Harbour district at 24,662 and 64,102 followed by the Southern Harbour District at 21,817 and 36,070 respectively. The highest number of unauthorised absences in the primary and secondary Cycles of education took place in the Northern Harbour district at 19,253 and 76,963 followed by the Southern Harbour District at 16,764 and 50,527 respectively.

The same pattern was followed in the 2007-2008 scholastic years. Authorised absences in the primary and secondary Cycles of education in the Northern Harbour district stood at 21,128 and 48,251 followed by the Southern Harbour District at 18,356 and 24,481 respectively. Unauthorised absences stood at 19,453 and 70,280 in the Northern Harbour district for primary and secondary schools; followed by 18,934 and 45,226 respectively in the Southern Harbour district.[54]

01.3.3 Mainstreaming Children with Social, Emotional and Behaviour Difficulties

The presence of violence, anti-social behaviour, bullying, and other forms of social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD) in schools impacts a child's or youth's perception to schooling and can lead to ESL both with regard to the student suffering from SEBD or students that are impacted by the behaviour (for example bully) of a student who has a SEBD condition. To date, whilst Malta has not experienced the extreme forms of disaffection, violence, and anti-social behaviour seen in other countries issues related to SEBD prevail.

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51   Education Statistics: 2006 to 2008, National Statistics Office, 2011, http://www.nso.gov.mt/statdoc /document_file.aspx?id=3127
52   Ibid
53   Ibid
54   Ibid

For example, in a study carried out secondary school students identified as having SEBD, students referred to a number of school factors contributing to their academic and behaviour difficulties. They attributed their poor performance and misbehaviour to negative attitudes by teachers and peers and to a system that failed to address their needs. They particularly found it difficult to interact with teachers who did not respect them and who did not understand them.[55]

In a similar study with 20 students with a SEBD condition, most of the reasons given by the students for their behaviour difficulties were directly related to the school, teachers, and peers, particularly unfairness and unsupportive and unresponsive teachers. Most of the students stated that they had very little say in decisions related to school and classroom regulations, classroom management or teaching and learning. They thought that such a situation exacerbated their difficulties, but they believed that if they were more involved in the decisions affecting them, their behaviour would improve.[56]

It is pertinent to underline that more recently, research carried out on behalf of the National Commission for Persons with a Disability (KNPD)suggests that situations occur where the school or the education professionals across the three sectors of education "do not understand or treat well" children or youths who are "labelled" to have a challenging behaviour condition – such as ignoring the youth or child or always pinning the blame on him or her when behaviour issues arise within the school. It was underlined that there is "limited feedback between the parents of a child or youth who has a challenging behaviour condition and the teacher and at times a lack of understanding from the school".[57] In one particular instance, the family had felt that they had no alternative but not to send the child to school.

MEDE has set up Learning Support Zones and Nurture Groups to ensure that students who have a SEBD difficulty are provided the appropriate assistance. The objectives of the Learning Support Zones and Nurture Groups are to[58]:

• Provide teaching and support tailored to the needs of difficult or at risk students.

• Minimise disruption caused by challenging students, without excluding them.

• Keep disaffected students at school, addressing their behavioural problems and helping them to reintegrate into mainstream classes.

• Work towards reducing fixed term and permanent exclusion, reducing the number of disruptive behaviour.

• Improve levels of literacy and numeracy.

There are currently 4 Learning Support Zones in operation, and another one is planned to be set up within the proposed Mtarfa education complex.[59]

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55   Massa, S. (2002) The School as a Community: Perceptions of Secondary School Students with Emotional Behavioural Difficulties. Unpublished B.Ed Dissertation. Faculty of Education, University of Malta cited in Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in Malta: An educational perspective, Journal of Maltese Education Research, Vol: 4, 1:2006 by Cefai, C., and Cooper, P. http://www.um.edu.mt/educ/about/publications/mrer/files/JMERN4I1P2.pdf

56   Bartolo, P. and Tabone, J. (2002) The Voice of the Students. A Qualitative Investigation on the Views of Secondary School Students with Behaviour Problems. Unpublished B.Ed (Hons) Dissertation, Faculty of Education, University of Malta cited in Social, emotional and behavioural difficulties in Malta: An educational perspective, Journal of Maltese Education Research, Vol: 4, 1:2006 by Cefai, C., and Cooper, P.

57   Gialanze, M., and Spiteri Gingell, D., Understanding Persons with Challenging Behaviour, National Council for Persons with a Disability, August 2012

58   https://www.education.gov.mt/Page.aspx?pid=319&depid=2&pageid=13

59   Email dated 19th October 2012 by the Department of Student Services

Table 03:   **Learning Support Zones and Nurture Groups in Operation**

Centre	Number of Students
Learning Support Centre Naxxar Secondary Girls	(2012-2013) 5 initial referrals. 3 students being successfully reintegrated. Centre can cater for 8 students
Learning Support Centre Marsa Primary	From its onset in 2010 the Learning Support Centre Marsa has supported 7 students with 5 being successfully integrated Centre can cater for 8 students
Learning Support Centre Marsa Primary Boys	25 students. Centre can take up to 30
Mater Dei School Msida	11 students.

01.3.4 Mainstreaming Disabled Persons in Malta's Education System

It is to be noted that the right of disabled people to education was recognised following the release of the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC), which was the first document of its kind to include disabled people in mainstream educational provision, together with references to differences based on race and gender. Admittedly, the provisions to disabled policy in education only targeted disabled children during the period of compulsory schooling and parents have the ultimate choice on whether their child attends mainstream schooling. The MEDE also drew up the National Inclusive Policy in 2000, which, inter alia, introduced the Individual Educational Programme (IEP) aimed at supporting disabled students within mainstream schools. This policy also proposed a strategy to achieve the goal of inclusion by providing disabled people with better quality education and learning support assistance to achieve this goal.[60]

While this policy was partly successful in achieving its goals, in 2004 it was agreed that the policy needed reform as it was failing some students. This led to the setting up of a working group composed of members from the areas of education and disability. In keeping with the Salamanca Statement of 1994, of which Malta is a signatory, one of the central recommendations proposed by the review concerned changing the role of special schools to resource centres. Such centres would provide specialised services to disabled students attending the mainstream or other special schools at particular times or days.[61]

Apart from the redefined role of special schools, over the past years educational provisions have included the services of what was originally termed a "facilitator" (or, as it is now known, a Learning Support Assistant) who had the role of helping the disabled child integrate better within the class. However, following the publication of the Spiteri report, it was noted that facilitators tended to be unqualified and lacked adequate training and/or experience. Subsequently, people working with disabled children were obliged to have proper certification and training, which was provided by the Student Services Department (SSD - which falls under MEDE). The course provided prospective individuals supporting disabled children within an educational context the new title of Learning Support Assistants (LSA) – and they were also provided with training by KNPD involving disabled speakers.[62]

The results of the 2005 National Census demonstrates that the reforms have resulted in a higher rate of disabled people is going beyond secondary level when compared to the national average – although the current policy direction where-in assistance is provided only up to compulsory education means that the level of presence of disabled persons at higher and further education remained low.

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60 ANED Country Report on Equality of Educational and Training Opportunities for Young Disabled People, Academic Network of European Disability Experts, May 2010
61 Ibid
62 Ibid

Table 04: Educational Participation Level Achieved by Disabled Persons[63]

Educational Level	10 - 19	20-29	30-39	National Average
	%	%	%	%
No schooling	-	-	4.4	2.4
Special school for persons with a disability	19.7	25.7	15.3	0.3
Pre-primary	-	-	0.3	0.4
Primary level	13.8	6.3	7.7	25.5
Secondary level	54.8	45.1	54.2	45.3
Post-secondary level	10.8	14.3	9.8	13.8
Non-tertiary level	0.9	1.9	2.8	2.7
Tertiary level	-	6.7	6.9	9.6
Total	100	100	100	100

The Table below presents the level of qualifications achieved by disabled people in the 20 - 39 age groups (or the first generation coming through the inclusive educational system) has almost reached the level of the national average. Conversely, one also notes that, even among 20 year olds, the majority of disabled people have no qualifications. It is also concerning that disabled people, including those between 10 and 39 exhibit high rates of illiteracy when compared with the non-disabled population. The average illiteracy rate in these age groups is of 23.5% - a high rate when compared to the rate of 6% in the non-disabled population.[64]

Table 05: Highest Qualifications Attained by Disabled People in Malta Compared with Non-Disabled Persons[65]

Highest Qualifications Attained by Disabled People in Malta compared with non-disabled people	10-19 Disabled people	20-29 Disabled people	30-39 Disabled people	Average for whole population
	%	%	%	%
No qualifications attained	65.6	64.6	67.4	57.0
O level	23.8	13.1	9.7	15.4
Intermediate level	0.2	0.8	0.5	0.9
A level	6.6	6.2	3.5	6.8
Certificate or diploma not issued by university	3.8	8.6	12.0	10.4
University diploma	-	1.3	1.3	1.5
First degree	-	3.2	1.9	3.2
Professional qualification	-	0.4	0.8	1.3
Both a degree and a professional qualification	-	0.9	0.9	1.2
Post-graduate diploma or certificate	-	0.3	0.5	0.9
Masters	-	0.6	1.4	1.2
Doctorate (PhD/DBA)	-	-	0.1	0.3
Total	100	100	100	100

Recent data collected by KNPD in 2007 to help in the drawing up of its National Disabled People Employment Policy showed that the number of disabled people who were attending post-secondary and university levels totalled 128 students, which constituted just 0.9% of the general population of students at these levels. Additionally, the number of disabled people under 20 years old who benefited from the employment agency's Bridging the Gap and Work Start scheme[66] totalled 2 people, whilst 13 individuals in the age range 21-41 benefited.[67]

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63   Bezzina, F., Callus, A. M. and Cardona, G. C. (2010) The Quality of Life of Disabled People: Some answers from Census 2005. Malta: KNPD, http://www.knpd.org /
64   Ibid
65   Ibid
66   ANED Country Report on Equality of Educational and Training Opportunities for Young Disabled People, Academic Network of European Disability Experts, May 2010
67   Ibid

The table below compares the labour status of disabled people in the age groups 10-19, 20-29 and 30-39 with the national average. The data above clearly illustrates that while employment levels in the age range of 20 - 39 are comparable to those in the average of the general population, unemployment rates for disabled people are twice that or higher. Moreover, the rate of disabled people continuing with their studies is below average for 20 - 29 year olds.[68]

**Table 06:   Disabled People's Labour Status in Malta**

Disabled People's Labour status in Malta	10-19	20-29	30-39	Avg for whole population
	%	%	%	%
Perceived un/employed but not according to ILO (Inactive)	5.1	4.2	2.7	-
Employed	9.8	39.9	39.5	45.8
Unemployed	7.9	9.2	6.3	3.3
Student or trainee	58.8	6.3	0.3	7.1
Retired	-	-	-	15.8
Cannot work because of disability or illness	15.7	34.8	35.1	2.3
Taking care of house and/or family	0.8	4.4	14.9	23.3
Other status	1.9	1.2	1.2	2.4
Total	**100**	**100**	**100**	**100**

01.3.5 Changing Demographic Profile

One particular emerging phenomenon in Malta's demographic fabric, which affects the education system, is the increase of immigrants in Malta – legally or otherwise. It is to be noted that of the total population of 416,055 persons, 20,086, or 4.8%, are non-Maltese nationals, an increase of 65.8% over 2005, where the number of non-Maltese nationals stood at 12,112, or 3%, of the total population. In addition, a higher proportion of non-Maltese nationals are observed in the younger age groups when compared to Maltese nationals.[69]

In particular nearly a fourth of them are between 25 and 34 years, compared to 14.1% of Maltese nationals. On a regional basis, a higher proportion of non-Maltese nationals reside in the Northern Harbour, South Eastern and Northern Districts. In particular, the majority of non-Maltese residents (37.6%) reside in the Northern Harbour District as their Maltese counterparts (28.4%), but a smaller percentage of non-Maltese residents reside in the Southern Harbour District (8% compared to 19.6% for Maltese nationals).[70] The Figure below shows the number of new applications for international protection filed at the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees involving children for the period 2006 – 2008.

Figure 08:   New applications for international protection filed at the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees involving children by year: 2006-2008[71]

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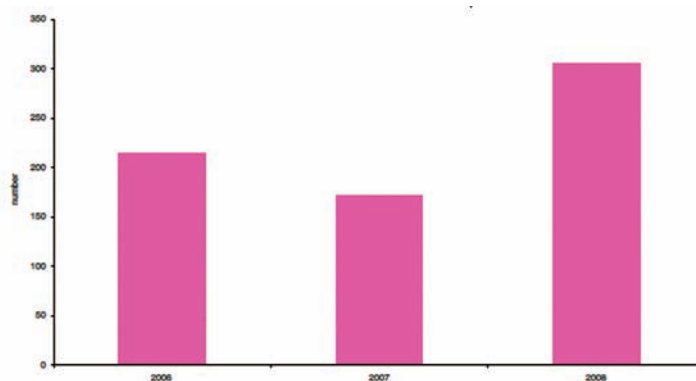
68   ANED Country Report on Equality of Educational and Training Opportunities for Young Disabled People, Academic Network of European Disability Experts, May 2010
69   Census of Population and Housing 2011, Preliminary Report, National Statistics Office, 2012
70   Ibid
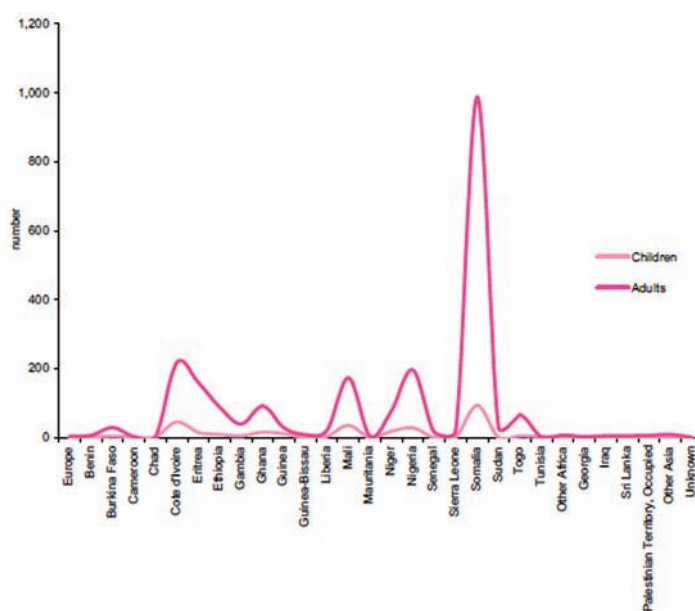71   Children: 2010, National Statistics Office, 2010

A research study carried out in 2010 on students of ethnic minority origin in State schools carried out on the basis of questionnaires addressed toward the ten State colleges (of which one did not respond) shows that the number of minority students, at least in State colleges, is not negligible – particularly compared to over 15 years ago when Malta's population make-up was over whelming homogenous. As can be seen from the Table below, 555 students in primary and secondary State colleges are from ethnic minorities.[72]

Table 07:   **Students of Ethnic Minority Origin in State Schools Scholastic Year: 2008-2009[73]**

COLLEGE	PRIMARY		SECONDARY	
	BOYS	GIRLS	BOYS	GIRLS
College 1	21	21	2	9
College 2	17	10	6	13
College 3	50	48	38	53
College 4	6	6	17	NA
College 5	14	9	5	7
College 6	4	6	34	9
College 7	15	16	8	28
College 8	6	7	16	8
College 9	14	11	4	19
TOTAL	145 (26%)	134 (24%)	130 (24%)	146 (26%)
OVERALL TOTAL	555			

The research underlines that despite these high numbers the State is not recognising the importance of providing more specialised resources which would help the integration of these students in the different school communities. Indeed, the challenge that is faced by the education institutions with regard to introducing support services to allow students from immigrant communities to integrate is best demonstrated by the Figure below which shows the myriad of nationalities that applied for international protection in 2008.

Figure 09:   **New applications for international protection filed at the Office of the Commissioner for Refugees by country of residence: 2008[74]**

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72   Calleja, C., Cauchi, B., and Grech, M., Education and Ethnic Minorities in Malta, e-SPICES Learning Partnership, 2010
73   Ibid
74   Children: 2010, National Statistics Office, 2010

It is pertinent to state that the conclusion reached in the afore cited research is confirmed in the feedback received during the consultation process on the draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) which amongst others expressed:

"[State] colleges should have an intensive fast track Maltese and / or English programme that is provided to such a student (and to his or her parents) to ensure that the student reaches a basic understanding of Maltese and / or English, as the case may be, in the shortest time possible … [given] the increasing number of learners coming from ethnic minorities, there is a need for a more proactive strategy directed to ensure that the education system will cater for such students … that the focus directed towards the integration of students with disabilities and developmental delays into mainstream education should be replicated with regard to students coming from minority groups …".[75]

01.3.6 Changing Social Profile

The Table below shows the number of births in Malta between 1980 and 2009. It is to be noted that whilst child bearing in married families has been falling consistently, single parent child bearing has, on the other hand, increased significantly. In 2009, 1 out of every 4.6 children was born to a single parent.

Additionally, the number of children born in 2009 to mothers under the age of 20 years categorised as outside of marriage stood at 260 – a significant increase when compared to 59 such births in 1980.[76]

Table 08: Life Births by Age of Mother: 1980-2009[77]

Live Births by Age of Mother	1980		1985		1990		1995		2000		2005		2009	
	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births	Maltese & other births	Illegitimate Births
Under 20	174	59	195	21	164	24	201	59	249	113	230	210	281	260
20 - 24	1,530	14	1,170	17	2,007	28	986	67	900	155	661	248	600	343
25 - 29	2,018	19	2,067	14	2,157	19	1,730	35	1,590	87	1,438	160	1,389	265
30 - 34	1,470	15	1,342	11	1,456	13	1,371	31	1,086	41	1,111	111	1,316	163
35 - 39	503	7	678	3	580	10	590	17	444	29	327	34	472	87
40 - 44	117	3	128		195	1	120	3	113	8	83	16	73	15
45 - 49	4	1	3		9		5	1	4	1	5		3	1
50 - 54											3			
55 - 59														
60 - 64														
65+														
	5816	118	5583	66	6568	95	5003	213	4386	464	3858	779	4134	1134
	5934		5649		6663		5216		4850		4637		5268	

A categorisation of single teenage mothers by age over the period 1999 – 2008 is shown in the Figure below. The total teenage mothers <18 years old (single teenage mothers <18 years old stood at 55) stood at 104 in 2008, and the percentage of single teenage mothers <18 years old stood at 52.9%.

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75 Analysis of Feedback to the Consultation Process on the Draft National Curriculum Framework, Final Report, Ministry of Education and Employment, August 2012
76 Strategic Review on the Adequacy, Sustainability and Social Solidarity of the Pensions System, 2010 Pensions Working Group, December 2010
77 Ibid

Figure 10: **Single teenage mothers by age: 1999-2008**[78]
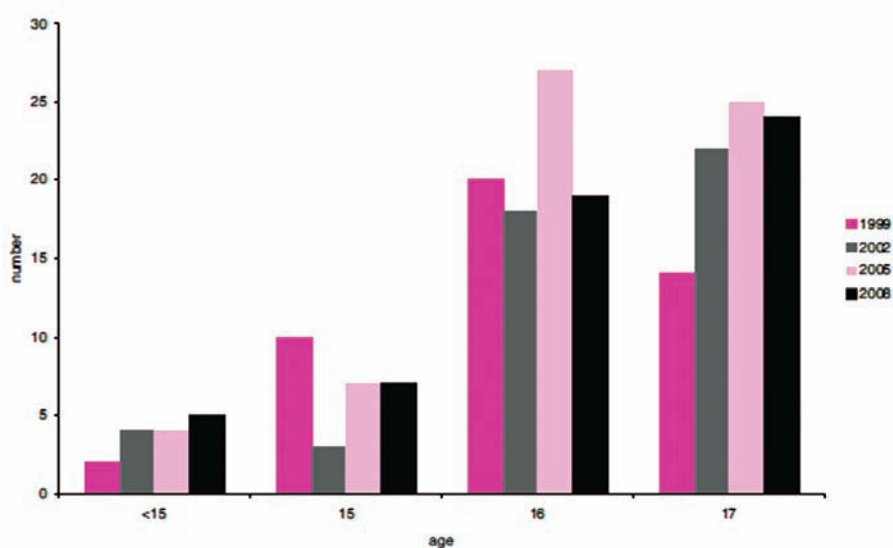
01.3.7 Income and Economic Impact

In the Income and Living Conditions 2010 Survey several household characteristics gave an indication as to whether a child is more prone to being at-risk-of-poverty or not. The survey showed that children living in households with high work intensities and larger disposable incomes tended to be less at-risk-of-poverty.

In contrast, when considering households with null work intensity, 78% of children were at-risk-of-poverty. An analysis across different household types indicates that children living with single parents were more at risk, with 57% of these children falling below the poverty threshold. The survey further showed that 95% of households that had at least one child had a computer.[78]

Table 09: **At-risk-of-poverty rates among children (aged 0-17) by various household characteristics: 2008-2010**[79]

| | | At-risk-of-poverty rates | | | |
| | | | | 2010 | |
		2008 (revised)	2009 (revised)	At-risk-of-poverty rate	Number of children at-risk-of-poverty
Total		19.3	20.9	19.9	15,790
Work intensity*	WI is equal to 0	78.0	68.1	78.0	5,070
	WI is greater than 0 but less than 0.5	[35.6]	35.5	[32.6]	[1,860]
	WI is greater or equal to 0.5 but less than 1	17.3	21.4	18.2	7,740
	WI is equal to 1	:	:	[4.6]	[1,120]
Household disposable income	€10,000 and under	97.9	97.0	98.4	4,730
	€10,001+	11.1	15.9	14.8	11,060
Household size	2	[60.2]	[58.2]	[59.1]	[1,170]
	3	14.8	19.1	15.3	2,300
	4	19.4	20.4	17.9	6,270
	5+	19.3	20.2	22.1	6,060
Household type	Single parent household, one or more dependent children	59.2	59.6	57.2	2,730
	2 adults, one dependent child	[7.9]	[12.1]	[11.2]	[1,500]
	2 adults, two dependent children	17.8	20.1	16.5	4,960
	2 adults, three or more dependent children	28.3	27.2	30.7	4,040
	Other households with one or more dependent children	[9.2]	12.1	14.3	2,560

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78   Statistics on Income and Living Conditions: 2010, National Statistics Office, 2012
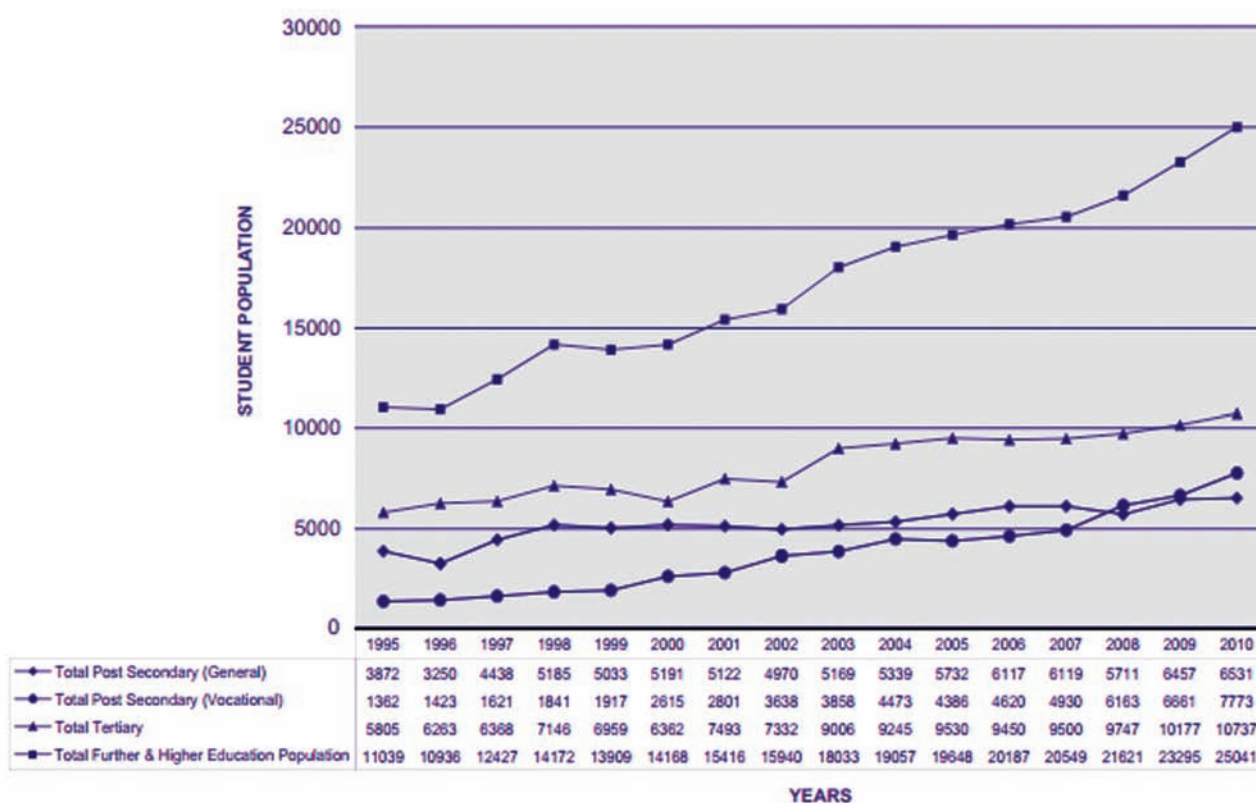79   Ibid

01.4 Early School Leavers in Malta

The Figure below explains the overall growth and trends in student participation rates within the further and higher education sector between 1995 and 2010. It illustrates the total number of students in Malta following further and higher education courses being full-time, part-time, distance learning, day or evening.

One can clearly see that as from the year 2007 onwards, there was a constant steady increase in participation rates of Maltese students in further and higher education. Over the last decade, Malta has witnessed an increase in participation rates in the further and higher education sector. Over the last ten years between 2000 and 2010, the total student population increased by 77%. In the last five years, the growth rate has been slower; that of 27%. Apart from showing the total figure of further and higher education population, this graph also illustrates separately the share of total student population enrolled within post-secondary (general) education, post-secondary (vocational) education and tertiary education.[80]

Figure 11:   **Total Student Population Following Further and Higher Education in Malta: 1995-2010[81]**

	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
Total Post Secondary (General)	3872	3250	4438	5185	5033	5191	5122	4970	5169	5339	5732	6117	6119	5711	6457	6531
Total Post Secondary (Vocational)	1362	1423	1621	1841	1917	2615	2801	3638	3858	4473	4386	4620	4930	6163	6661	7773
Total Tertiary	5805	6263	6368	7146	6959	6362	7493	7332	9006	9245	9530	9450	9500	9747	10177	10737
Total Further & Higher Education Population	11039	10936	12427	14172	13909	14168	15416	15940	18033	19057	19648	20187	20549	21621	23295	25041

YEARS

Whilst that participation in post-secondary (academic/general) education has on the whole remained constantly stable over the last fifteen years, since 1995 the participation in post-secondary (vocational) education has been gaining a steady increase in popularity from 2007 till today. The Figure reveals significant changes in Malta's further education sector where over 2008, 2009 and 2010 participation rates of students within post-secondary (vocational) education have been higher than that of post-secondary (academic) education. This shows a change in the trend of choice in post-secondary education of young Maltese students. Such a trend is seen more clearly in 2010, where 7,773 students have been identified within the post-secondary vocational sector; which represents 54% of the total post-secondary student population. Regarding tertiary education, one notes that participation rates are also increasing, albeitat a slower pace.[82]
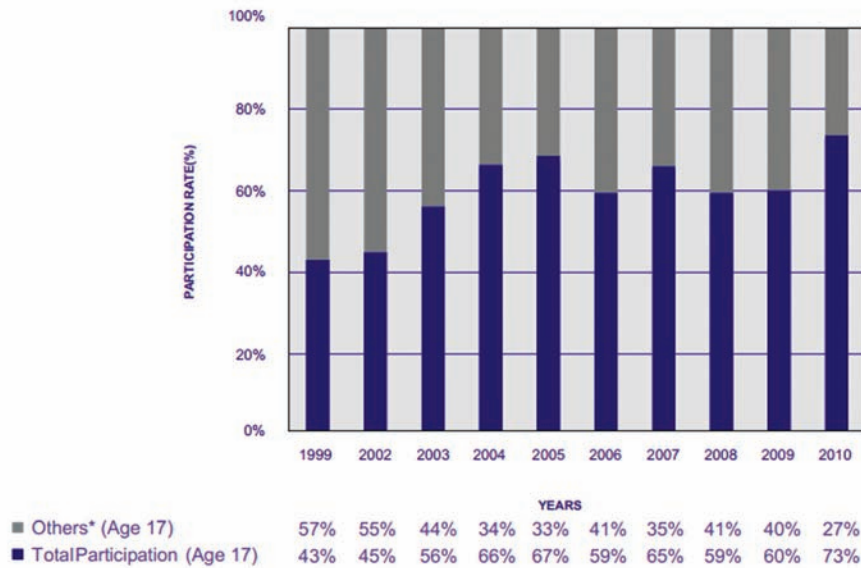
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80   NCHE Further and Higher Education Statistics 2010: Report of the Survey Health by the National Commission for Higher Education, February 2011
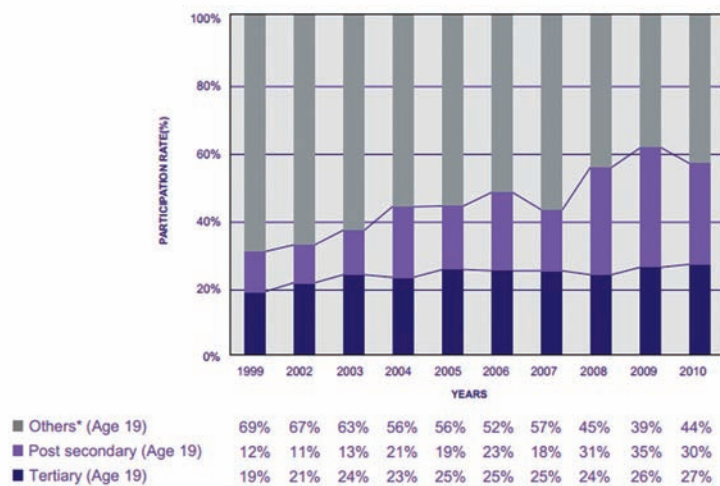
81   Ibid

82   Ibid

Additionally, the average participation rate of 17 year olds in post-secondary education during the last 5 years is on average 63%; where one can see that there has been a significant increase in participation rates between the years 2009 to 2010. In fact, the year 2010 recorded the highest participation rate of 17 years old, that of 73%.[83]

Figure 12:   17 Year Old Student Population Participating in Further and Higher Education[84]

YEARS	1999	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
■ Others* (Age 17)	57%	55%	44%	34%	33%	41%	35%	41%	40%	27%
■ Total Participation (Age 17)	43%	45%	56%	66%	67%	59%	65%	59%	60%	73%

At age 19, as shown in the Figure below, the total participation rate in further and higher education for the year 2010 was that of 56%; where 30% of which were enrolled within post-secondary education, whilst 27% were enrolled within tertiary institutions. This means that the participation rate of 19 year olds is much higher in post-secondary institutions rather than in tertiary institutions. The result of this phenomenon could be due to repeaters or those who have left education at the age of 16-17 who would have decided to re-engage back into education at the age of 19. Most of these students are being absorbed by MCAST.

Figure 13:   17 Year Old Student Population Participating in Further and Higher Education[85]

YEARS	1999	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010
■ Others* (Age 19)	69%	67%	63%	56%	56%	52%	57%	45%	39%	44%
■ Post secondary (Age 19)	12%	11%	13%	21%	19%	23%	18%	31%	35%	30%
■ Tertiary (Age 19)	19%	21%	24%	23%	25%	25%	25%	24%	26%	27%

* 'Others' refers to those students who are not registered in any of the institutions indicated in the survey.
(Source: 1994–2005 NSO Education Statistics; 2006-2007 NCHE provisional data; 2008-2009-2010 NCHE Further and Higher Education Statistics Survey 2008, 2009, 2010)

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83   Ibid
84   Ibid
85   Ibid

The Figure below depicts data with regard to ESL from education and training for the period 2005 to 2010. In the decade between 2000 and 2010, Malta registered the largest decrease in its rate of early school leavers.

Figure 14: **Trend in the Rate of Early School Leaving in the EU27 between 2000-2009**[86]

| STRONG DECREASE (over 6 p.p.)	SOME DECREASE (3.1-6.0 p.p.)	STABLE (0-3.0 p.p.)	INCREASE
Malta (-17.4) Portugal (-12.4) Luxembourg (-9.1) Lithuania (-7.8) Cyprus (-6.8%) Romania* (-6.3)	Italy (-5.9) Bulgaria* (-5.8) Netherlands (-4.5) Greece (-3.7) Germany (-3.5) Ireland** (-3.3)	Latvia** (-3.0) Belgium (-2.7) Hungary (-2.7) United Kingdom (-2.5) Poland* (-2.1) Slovakia** (-1.8) Austria (-1.5) Estonia (-1.2) Slovenia (-1.1) Denmark (-1.1) France (-1.0) Czech Republic** (-0.3)	Finland (0.9) Spain (2.1) Sweden (3.4)

It is to be noted that the rate stood at 54.2% in 2000.By 2010, policy measures introduced over the period under review resulted in a decrease in the ESL rate to 36.9% in 2010, which means a decrease of 17.3% over 11 years.[87]

Figure 15: **Early School Leavers from Education and Training (%)**[88]
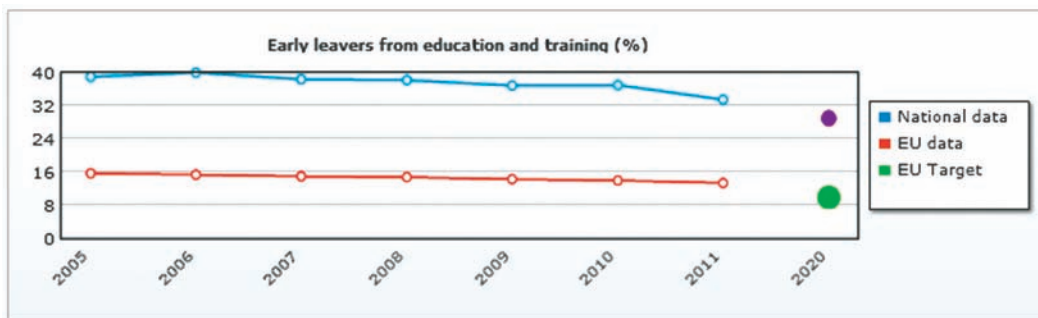
By 2011, as can be seen from the Figure below, Malta reduced the % of ESL from education and training by a further 4.5% to 33.5% - basically moving close to the 29% target established with regard to Malta under the Europe 2020 Strategy.

**Figure 16:** **Early School Leavers Rate 2011 – EU27**[89]

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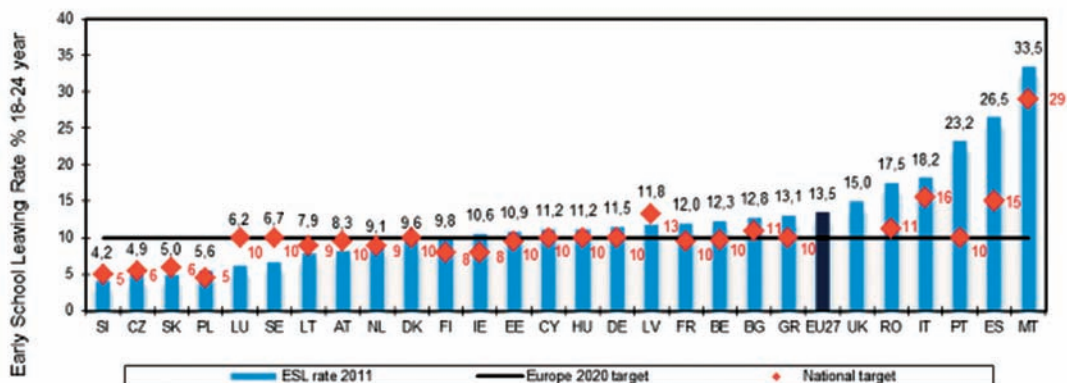
86   Neval, A., M., Hawley, J., et al Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU – A Study, Produced for the Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Education and Culture by GHK Consulting Ltd
87   http://www.doi-archived.gov.mt/EN/press_releases/2012/02/PR%200285.pdf
88   http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/europe-2020-in-your-country/malta/index_en.htm
89   http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/pdf/themes/21_early_school_leaving.pdf

Although the 2011 results show that Malta is improving at a rapid pace in stemming the ESL haemorrhage, the fact remains that Malta, even if it meets the ESL target of 29% by 2020 would still be significantly lagging behind when compared to other MS. It is, thus, important to underline, that a high ESL rate from education and training negatively impacts Malta's ability to further increase its human capital with regard to competencies and skills required to expand Malta's economic base – in particular towards high value added employment.

As can be seen from the Figure below, Malta ranks third from bottom with regard to 18 years old in education amongst the EU-27 and is below the EU average and follows only behind Croatia and Turkey when compared to non EU MS.

Figure 17:   18 Year Olds in Education - 2010[90]
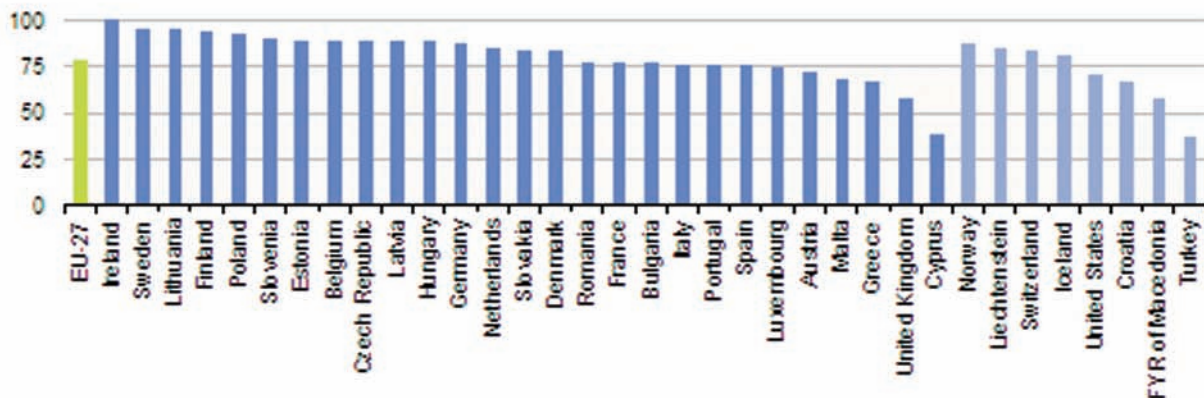
The level of school expectancy – that is the expected years of education over a lifetime – for Malta too ranks at the lower end amongst MS – with Malta preceding only Luxembourg and Slovenia and being below the EU-27.

Figure 18:   School Expectancy - 2010[91]
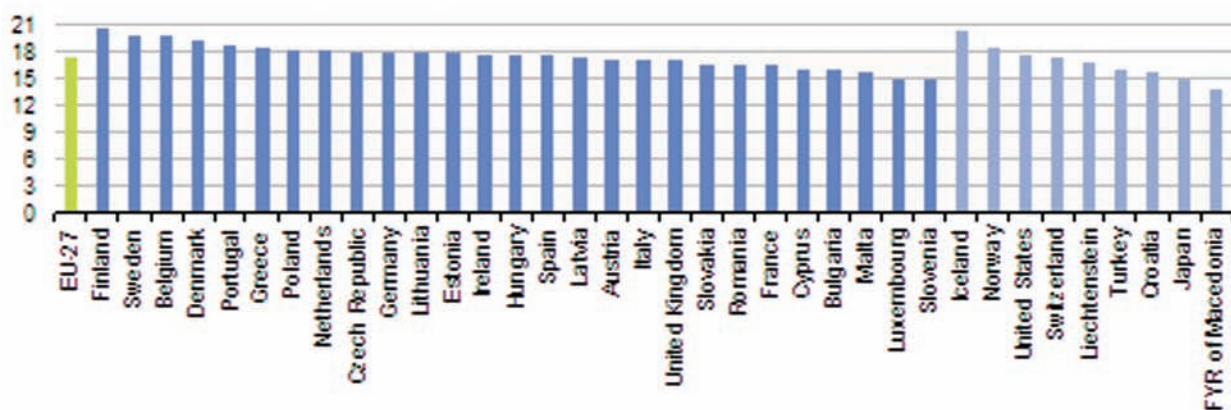
The latest ESL figure is predicted to be 24%. The significant improvement also reflects the fact that Malta's statistical methodology was base-lined to render it "fully compatible with the education classification used at EU level (ISCED) and improves the comparability of results across the EU. Eurostat in a letter titled 'Mapping of Education Levels under the International Standard Classification of Education' states that it confirms that it "would welcome the revision of the EU Labour Force Survey micro-data from 2010."[92]

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90   October 2012, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:18-year-olds_in_education,_ 2010_(1)_(%25_ of_all_18-year-olds).png&filetimestamp=20121001105817
91   October 2012, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/index.php?title=File:School_ expectancy, _2010_(1)_(years).png&fi letimestamp=20121001110112
92   Mapping of Education Levels under the International Standard Classification of Education,Capelot, B, E., Eurostat, EC, Luxembourg, Ref: ESTAT/F0/F5/EBC/CC/sl 1742202

Be that as it may, Malta's ranking with regard to ESL behaviour cannot be viewed in isolation. It is pertinent to underline that the reasons of why Malta lags behind other MS as well as why it is now covering ground with regard to the reduction of ESLs is linked with past education policy and the time required for the reforms embarked upon in the late 1990s and early 2000s to materialise.

In the late 1970s, the then Government reformed the further and higher educational system – resulting in the closing down of the then Polytechnic – the equivalent of MCAST today – and the restructuring of the University of Malta by reducing the disciplines available for study, the introduction of a student / worker scheme together with a guaranteed employment following graduation for, at least, a period of 2 years, and the introduction of a *numerus clausus* on a number of disciplines. A direct consequence of these reforms was the significant reduction in the number of students who could follow further and higher education even if they sought to do so.

A rapid transformation process was embarked upon in the late 1980s which saw the removal of the *numerus clauses* condition from practically all of the disciplines taught at the University of Malta together with a programme that saw new and important Faculties as well as disciplines being set up. Additionally, the Government liberalised the education sector leading to the setting up of new overseas Universities' full time as well as distance learning campuses.

The tertiary student population, therefore, exploded from approximately less than 1,000 graduating students in 1989 (Class of February 1984) limited to tuition provided only by the University of Malta to 5,166 by 1995, 5,554 by 2000 and to 8,308 in 2010. Similarly, the number of students in full time post-secondary general and vocational education increased from 5,234 in 1995 to 7,806 in 2000, and to 12,253 in 2010. These figures do not include the part-time student population which with regard to both post-secondary and tertiary education increased from 639 students in 1995, to 808 in 2000, to 4,480 in 2010. Thus, as more younger cohorts finish their compulsory, post-secondary and tertiary education the percentage of ESLs with regard to the 18 – 24 years of age cohort will continue to improve significantly.

Be that as it may, Malta, needs to continue with its efforts to address the challenges related to ESL.
A study carried out by the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) titled 'The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta' identified the following as key issues that impact the 'school to work transition' in Malta[93]:

(i) The type of secondary school that a young person attends determines to a great degree the type of path followed. Both from the tracer studies and surveys carried out it was found that those students that attend Area Secondary schools are more likely to stop at the compulsory education Cycle, moving to factory or elementary types of jobs. Many of them were found to end their education without any qualifications. Students in Junior Lyceum, Church and Independent schools had a greater chance to continue with post-secondary Education.

(ii) The provision of guidance in secondary schools tends to be biased towards the academic path. The different sources of data collected show that often guidance teachers are concerned with the subjects that students choose and often assume that all the students intend to follow the general education path. Secondary students get very little information about the opportunities within the vocational post-secondary system and how the different apprenticeship schemes work. Preparation for the actual world of work was found to be limited.

(iii) Schools were still detached from the world of work. Young persons were not learning how to deal with situations that may arise when at work and how to face them and so they tend to feel vulnerable when they start working, ending up either being too aggressive or else allowing their employers and/or colleagues to take advantage.

(iv) Preparation of young persons for the world of work: Whereas academically it appeared that young persons were of quite a good quality, there was much to be desired with respect to soft skills.

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93 The School to Work Transition of Young People in Malta: Results of a Study Among Young People Looking for Work, Monitoring and Evaluation Unit, Business Development Division, Employment and Training Corporation, 2006, http://etc.gov.mt/Resources/file/Resources/2006%20-%20The%20School%20to%20Work%20Transition %20of%20Young%20People%20in%20Malta.pdf

(v) Work opportunities for 16-18 year olds were few. The reasons for this situation included: too young and immature; lack work experience; and having little or no qualifications.

(vi) Few young persons had endorsed the concept of lifelong learning. Less than one third of the respondents surveyed stated that they wished to have further training following the completion of compulsory education.

(vii) Employers had a very limited role within the education system. The way through which employers were involved in the 'school to work transition' was often limited to sponsoring workplaces to apprentices and summer jobs.

(viii) There were few young persons who showed the inclination, initiative and willingness to be self-employed. In certain cases young persons complained that in their post-secondary course they were only being prepared to work as an employee and not to be self-employed.

It is pertinent to underline, that MEDE as well as other stakeholders following the conclusion of this study embarked on a series of complementary initiatives, as is discussed in Chapter 2, directed to address many of the issues raised in this study. Indeed, the first issue [i] that identified that the type of secondary school that a young person attended determined to a great degree the type of path that he or she subsequently followed was addressed in 2011 when streaming on the basis of examinations was removed – replaced by an education system that provided for a more differentiated teaching and schooling environment

Five local entities, in 2006, from the Cottonera region: the Community Resource Centre for Cottonera ACCESS (coordinator of the project) and the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), "APPOII Cottonera Community Services", "SEDQA Teen Support Services" and the Cottonera College embarked on a one year project directed to retain in education students identified at risk of becoming school drop-outs; attract back those students who had practically stopped going to school and risked not finishing their compulsory education. The project involved a series of measures that included adapting the structure of the curriculum and learning activities; reaching out to those school drop outs at risk of unemployment; helping students develop personally and to be better prepared for the world of work as well as improving their literacy and ICT skills; and providing support to the students, their families and their teachers at school.

32 Form V students (19 girls and 12 boys) and 15 Form IV students (8 girls and 7 boys) participated in the programme out of which 31 Form V students sat for their annual examinations and obtained their school leaving certificate. According to evaluation report, these numbers are significant considering that these were students which the normal school system had practically lost for good.

Heads of school participating in the project stated that a programme such as REACH which aimed at school drop-outs is of paramount importance as it provided insights into the reasons for which some students become habitual absentees, as well as what methods and approaches could be applied in order to attract such students back to school. The report identified the role of the "Family worker", who managed to convince a good number of students to return to school, as one of the kernels for the success of the project.[94]

It is also to be noted, that the alternative form of education provided under the project was seen by the students as "positive" and more "enjoyable" than "normal schooling" and considered as a better and more worthwhile experience due to the smaller number of students per learning mentor; the possibility to decide together on what activities to do; and the type of activities involved, especially those related directly to employment skills. Additionally, the involvement of the various key players within the locality including the parents in the process of getting the students back to school was seen as one other important result of the study.[95]

A more recent research study titled 'Mapping Social Inequality: The Spatial Distribution of Early School Leavers in Malta' identified that that ESL could be considered as a consequence that is related to the number of diverse interrelated socio-economic inequalities concentrated in particular districts – which inequalities whilst not, in themselves necessarily determining whether young individuals stay in or leave school early; when correlated with each other tend to render ESL more likely.

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94   http://www.epasi.eu/$-project-study.cfm?PID=232
95   Ibid

The research strongly supports the hypothesis that the locations of residence, and the inter-play of inequalities within, render ESL an option for some, but not for others. The study demonstrated that in Malta a strong correlation was reported between districts with high socio-economic inequalities and ELSs – which is in line with research carried out by GHK (2005) and the Council of Europe (2011), which further reports that a disadvantageous socio-economic background negatively influences the decision to stay in school.[96]

The study concludes that the Southern Harbour district, especially the localities of Marsa, Valletta, Isla and Bormla were found to produce the highest rates of ESLs and socio-economic inequalities in Malta.

The findings of the research study are disconcerting, given that the Southern Harbour district with 19% of Malta's population ranks as the second largest district – though the Southern Harbour District has registered a drop in population these past 16 years, from 83,234 in 1995 to 81,047 in 2005 and 79,203 in 2011.[97]

Figure 19: **Population distribution by district: 1995, 2005 and 2011**
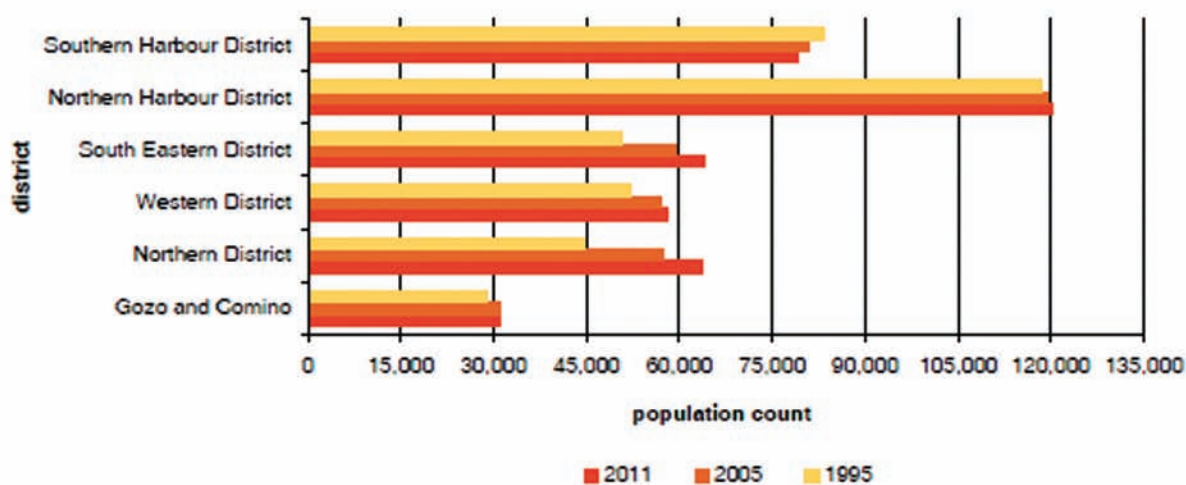
The Table below shows the number of candidates coming from each district sitting for both the SEC and the MATSEC.

Whilst the Southern Harbour district at 1.59 SEC per capita registration rivals the Northern Harbour district which has 1.5 SEC per capita registrations it falls considerably behind not only to the Northern Harbour district but the Western and Northern harbour districts respectively with regard to MATSEC examinations – which are qualifications that are necessary to carry out tertiary education – which, at face value, tends to reflect the conclusion reached by Gatt (2011) with regard to the Southern Harbour district having the largest number of ESLs.

Table 10: **Registration of Students for the SEC Examination by Locality**

Locality	Males		Females		Total	
	SEC[98]	MATSEC[99]	SEC	MATSEC	SEC	MATSEC
Southern Harbour	594	114	669	205	1,263	319
Northern Harbour	881	227	959	348	1,840	625
South Eastern	556	130	669	181	1,225	311
Western	464	185	561	235	1,025	420
Northern	558	184	639	246	1,197	430
Gozo	289	112	338	150	627	262

96   Gatt, J., The Spatial Distribution of Early School Leavers in Malta, 2012, http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets /pdf_file /0006/166299/ jacquelinegatearticle.pdf
97   Census of Population and Housing, 2011, Preliminary Report, National Statics Office, 2012
98   MATSEC Examinations Board, SEC Examinations 2011, MATSEC Support Unit, University of Malta, January 2012
99   MATSEC Examinations Board, Matriculation Examinations 2011, MATSEC Support Unit, University of Malta, April 2012

Gozo, with the highest rank of socio-economic inequalities and individuals who are at-risk-of-poverty, unemployed, with a low income and in need of social benefits from the government, however, did not follow this trend – which Gatt (2011) concludes that given the smaller size, double insularity and the specific economic background of Gozo results in different challengers to ESLs.[100]

Figure 20: **Percentage of Early School Leavers per District**[101]
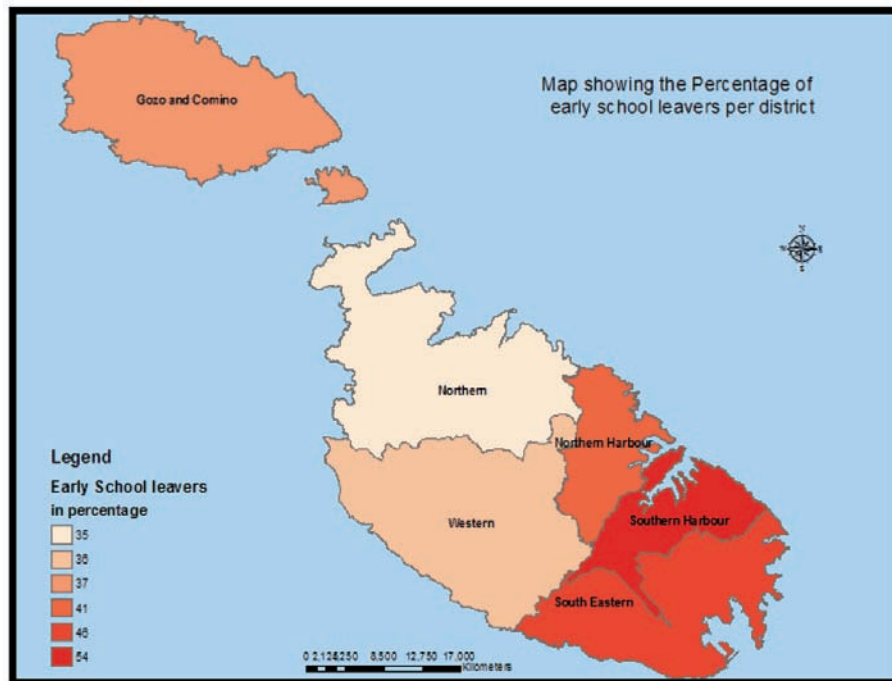
The research shows that a strong correlation is present in districts registering high rates of ESLs and low-skilled jobs, or areas with higher concentrations of family owned businesses. This leads Gatt (2012) to conclude that there is a strong correlation between employment and ESL.[102] Gatt, in her research, underlines that employment and unemployment have the highest impact on the increase or decrease of ESL; and adds that:

• There is a high gender bias (in favour of males) in the labour market given that there are more elementary occupations which require male employees are available.

• Females, only account for a small percentage of full time job employment, and in January 2011 there were 1,431 unemployed women in Malta and Gozo, rendering Malta's female employment rate the lowest in Europe. In this regard, it is pertinent to underline, whilst the ESL from education and training, as stated earlier, in 2011 stood at 33.5%, in terms of gender stratification this constituted, as is shown in the Table below, of 27.6% females and 38.9% males.

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100 Ibid
101 Ibid
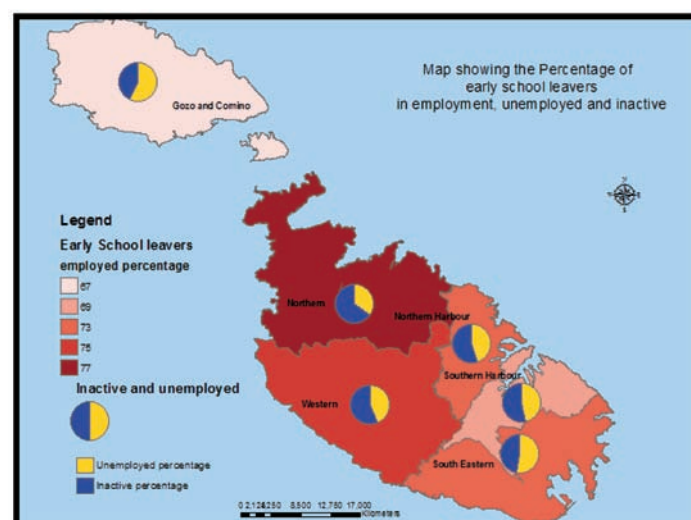102 Ibid

Table 11: **Youth Education Attainment Level and Early School Leavers from Education and Training[103]**

	Youth education attainment level				Early leavers from education and training			
	Total		Male	Female	Total		Male	Female
	2006	2011	2011		2006	2011	2011	
EU-27	77.9	79.5	76.7	82.4	15.5	13.5	15.3	11.6
Belgium	82.4	81.6	78.3	84.9	12.6	12.3	14.9	9.7
Bulgaria	80.5	85.5	86.2	84.8	17.3	12.8	12.0	13.7
Czech Republic	91.8	91.7	90.6	92.8	5.1	4.9	5.4	4.4
Denmark (2)	77.4	70.0	63.6	76.6	9.1	9.6	12.1	7.0
Germany	71.9	75.8	73.5	78.1	13.7	11.5	12.4	10.6
Estonia	82.0	82.6	79.3	86.1	13.5	10.9	13.1	8.6
Ireland	85.8	86.9	84.7	89.0	12.1	10.6	12.5	8.7
Greece	81.0	83.6	79.8	87.4	15.5	13.1	16.1	10.1
Spain	61.6	61.7	54.5	69.2	30.5	26.5	31.0	21.9
France	83.3	83.8	81.7	85.9	12.4	12.0	13.9	10.2
Italy	75.5	76.9	73.5	80.5	20.6	18.2	21.0	15.2
Cyprus	83.7	87.7	84.6	90.4	14.9	11.2	15.1	8.1
Latvia	81.0	80.4	76.1	84.9	14.8	11.8	15.9	7.7
Lithuania	88.2	86.9	83.0	91.0	8.2	7.9	10.6	5.0
Luxembourg (2)(3)	69.3	73.3	68.9	77.7	14.0	6.2	7.6	6.0
Hungary	82.9	83.3	82.0	84.5	12.6	11.2	12.1	10.3
Malta	51.1	59.2	52.9	66.5	39.9	33.5	38.9	27.6
Netherlands (2)	74.7	78.2	74.6	81.9	12.6	9.1	10.8	7.2
Austria	85.8	85.4	84.0	86.9	9.8	8.3	8.8	7.8
Poland	91.7	90.0	87.4	92.8	5.4	5.6	7.4	3.8
Portugal	49.6	64.4	58.0	71.0	39.1	23.2	28.2	18.1
Romania	77.2	79.6	77.9	81.3	17.9	17.5	18.5	16.6
Slovenia	89.4	90.1	86.8	94.1	5.6	4.2	5.7	2.5
Slovakia	91.5	93.3	92.6	94.0	6.6	5.0	5.4	4.6
Finland	84.7	85.4	83.6	87.3	9.7	9.8	11.2	8.4
Sweden	84.9	88.7	87.4	90.0	13.0	6.6	7.8	5.3
United Kingdom (4)	78.8	80.1	78.4	81.8	11.3	15.0	16.2	13.8
Iceland	49.3	56.9	55.4	58.4	25.6	19.7	22.2	17.1
Norway (2)	68.6	71.2	65.4	77.2	17.8	16.6	19.9	13.1
Switzerland	78.1	83.0	82.6	83.4	9.6	6.3	6.8	5.7
Croatia	94.6	95.6	94.8	96.5	4.7	4.1	4.8	3.4
FYR of Macedonia	75.8	85.3	87.4	83.1	22.8	13.5	11.9	15.2
Turkey	46.0	52.6	57.8	48.0	48.8	41.9	37.7	45.7

The above represents an improvement of 5.9% with regard to female ESLs when compared to 2006 – and only an improvement of 1% with regard to male ESLs over the same time frame. Be that as it may, the % of female ESLs is still the highest amongst the EU27, followed by Spain at 21.9%.

• Districts with higher rates of teenage pregnancy also have higher rates of female ESLs. This suggests that females are still limited when it comes to education and employment, especially when they have family responsibilities.

Figure 21: **Percentage of Early School Leavers in Employment, Unemployment and Inactive**

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103 October 2012, http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/statistics_explained/images/d/db/Youth_education_ attainment level_and_ early_ leavers_from_education_and_training%2C_2006_and_2011_%281%29_ %28%25%29.png

02

Europe 2020 Strategy and Policy Measures Underway

02. Europe 2020 Strategy and Policy Measures Underway

02.1 Europe2020 Strategy

The Europe2020 Strategy is designed as the EU's response to the economic and social crisis that has engulfed Europe since 2008. The Strategy places three mutually reinforcing priorities to overcome the structural weaknesses that the crisis has exposed. These are[104]:

- **Smart growth**: developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.

- **Sustainable growth**: promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.

- **Inclusive growth**: fostering a high-employment economy delivering social and territorial cohesion.

The Europe2020 Strategy, on the basis of the ET 2020 Strategic Framework for Education, establishes a number of targets which are of consequence to a process leading to the design of an ESL strategy for Malta. The Europe 2020 Strategy establishes that the target on educational attainment which tackles the problem of early school leavers should be directed to reducing the dropout rate to 10% from the current 15%, whilst the share of the population aged 30-34 having completed tertiary education is to increase from 31% to at least 40% in 2020.[105] The Strategy underlines that in the EU less than one person in three aged 25-34 has a university degree compared to 40% in the US and over 50% in Japan; and that according to the Shanghai index, only two European universities are in the world's top 20.

In this regard, the Europe2020 Strategy presents seven flagships initiatives to catalyse progress with regard to the three priorities referred to above. With direct regard to ESL, of particular interest are two of these measures. These are presented below:

(a) **"Youth on the move"** to enhance the performance of education systems and to facilitate the entry of young people to the labour market.

The aim of this Flagship initiative is to enhance the performance and international attractiveness of Europe's higher education institutions and raise the overall quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both excellence and equity, by promoting student mobility and trainees' mobility, and improve the employment situation of young people. The Strategy underlines that at a national level, MSareto:[106]

- Ensure efficient investment in education and training systems at all levels (pre-school to tertiary).

- Improve educational outcomes, addressing each segment (pre-school, primary, secondary, vocational and tertiary) within an integrated approach, encompassing key competences and aiming at reducing ESL.

- Enhance the openness and relevance of education systems by building national qualification frameworks and better gearing of learning outcomes towards labour market needs.

- Improve young people's entry into the labour market through integrated action covering guidance, counselling and apprenticeships.

(b) **"An agenda for new skills and jobs"** to modernise labour markets and empower people by developing their skills throughout their life journey with a view to increase labour participation and better match labour supply and demand, including through labour mobility.

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104 A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth: Europe 2020, COM(2010) 2020 final, Brussels 3.3.2010.http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri= COM:2010:2020:FIN: EN: PDF
105 Ibid
106 Ibid

The aim is to create conditions for modernising labour markets with a view to raising employment levels and ensuring the sustainability of the EU's social construct. This means the need to empower people through the acquisition of new skills to enable current and future workforce to adapt to new conditions and potential career shifts, reduce unemployment and raise labour productivity. The Strategy underlines that at a national level, MS are to:[107]

- Implement their national pathways for flexicurity, as agreed by the European Council, to reduce labour market segmentation and facilitate transitions as well as facilitating the reconciliation of work and family life.

- Review and regularly monitor the efficiency of tax and benefit systems so to make work pay with a particular focus on the low skilled, whilst removing measures that discourage self-employment.

- Promote new forms of work-life balance and active ageing policies and to increase gender equality.

- Promote and monitor the effective implementation of social dialogue outcomes.

- Give a strong impetus to the implementation of the European Qualifications Framework, through the establishment of national qualification frameworks.

- Ensure that the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market are acquired and recognised throughout general, vocational, higher and adult education, including non-formal and informal learning.

- Develop partnerships between the worlds of education/training and work, in particular by involving social partners in the planning of education and training provision.

It is pertinent to underline, that the targets that are set in the Strategy are representative, and not exhaustive – in that they represent an overall view of where the EC wishes to see the EU on key parameters by 2020. Thus, they do not represent a "one size fits all" approach.

The target set in the Europe 2020 Strategy by the EC for Malta with regard to ESL is that of reducing the **% of ESL to 29%.**[108]

02.2   The National Reform Programme

The Country Specific Recommendation (CSR) 3 presented by the EC with regard to the first National Reform Programme (NRP) under the Europe 2020 Strategy establishes that "[Malta is to] take further measures to reduce early school-leaving by identifying, analysing and measuring its causes by 2012 and by setting up a regular monitoring and reporting mechanism on the success rate of the measures."[109] The NRP document states that over the period 2000–2010 Malta has achieved significant progress given that the ESL rate in 2000 stood at 54.2 % as opposed to 36.9% in 2010.

In presenting the action taken by Malta with regard to the tackling of the issue of ESLs is the need to introduce appropriate preventive measures directed to identify students at risk of dropping out of education and subsequently to offer them the necessary support.[110] In this regard the NRP underlines the following preventive policy measures:

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107 Ibid
108   Commission Staff Working Document, Assessment of the 2012 national reform programme and stability programme for MALTA, SWD(2012) 321 final, Brussels, 30.5.2012
109 Malta National Reform Programme, April 2012
110 Ibid

(a)   Tackling Absenteeism by Strengthening Student Services[111]

The NRP states that the Directorates in the MEDE have introduced preventive policy measures which include the strengthening of the education psycho-services at the grass roots within schools and is strengthening this through the establishment of multi-disciplinary teams which will monitor families which have a profile of high child absenteeism from schools order to provide them with the support needed to socially address such problems.

Furthermore, as from scholastic year 2011/2012, all guidance teachers started giving their services to both primary and secondary students in all colleges. In order to reduce the rate of absenteeism in compulsory education, during 2010, a team of social workers consisting of 15 social workers, 4 social support workers, and 1 principal social worker was set up.

Moreover, social workers have been attending tribunal sittings since the onset of the provision of the service. The social worker attends and assists the Commissioner of Justice in reaching decisions regarding school absenteeism cases arraigned in Local Tribunals. The role of the social workers is that of providing relevant information to the Commissioner pertaining to each student.

Multidisciplinary teams working within the colleges were strengthened through the recruitment of various professionals including social workers, psychologists, psychotherapists, trainee counsellors, trainee career guidance advisors and family workers to offer support to students of diverse social, cultural and national backgrounds and to help prevent them from leaving school because of problems which their families maybe facing. To achieve this, as from July 2011, 5 social support workers started co-working with social workers from 5 different Colleges.

This National Referral System is strengthened through the inclusion of youth workers in the colleges - which has led to the development of a variety of support programmes within the colleges. Working within multi-disciplinary teams, the youth workers organise after school-community based programmes for learners. These programmes aim to offer support, skill acquisition and formation to youths thus preventing future absenteeism.

(b)   Introduction of Vocational Subjects in Secondary Schools[112]

During 2010, MEDE signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Pearson Education Ltd expressing the intention to collaborate on the provision of Business and Technician Education Council (BTEC) qualifications for the schools sector in Malta. The collaboration agreement covered the supply of qualifications and associated teaching and learning resources, training of staff as appropriate to enable the delivery of the qualifications in Malta, training in quality assurance methodology and practice to ensure high quality standards in the delivery of all programmes, support for the promotion and marketing to parents and learners, and advice and guidance to support the establishment and implementation of the vocational and core programmes.

Additionally, the NRP makes reference to the recommendations in the draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) –discussed at length later in this document – which envisages the introduction of pre-vocational subjects as core curriculum options during the last three years of secondary education. The objective of this reform is to provide alternative pathways that may be more tuned to a skill based subject content then an academic one.

As from September 2011, four vocational subjects (Engineering, Hospitality, IT Practitioner and Health and Social Care Services) are piloted in six state Colleges and four non-state schools. By 2014, the implementation of Vocational Education Training (VET) is expected to be extended nationally with the long-term objective to develop a VET qualification delivery model suitable for Malta.

(c)   Introduction of Embedded Learning for Foundation (Level 1) Students[113]

This project, led by the Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), is aimed at giving students who only hold a Secondary School Certificate, the opportunity to improve their proficiency in Maltese, English and Mathematics and IT through learning their choice of vocational studies. Following the success of the Foundation

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111 Ibid
112 Ibid
113 Ibid

Programme at Level 2, MCAST decided to introduce a Level 1 Introductory Certificate for post-secondary students, thus seeking to support them on their way to higher level programmes. This Level 1 Introductory Certificate is based on the concept of Embedded Learning - that is a process where teaching and learning combines the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills. The skills acquired provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to progress, gain qualifications and to succeed in life and at work.

The overall results obtained by Level 1 students during the scholastic year 2010-2011 indicate a very good retention rate of 70%, as well as excellent results in the Key Skills area (Maths, English, Maltese, IT and Personal Development). In fact in September 2011, the entire 70% Level 1 student cohort decided to continue with their Level 2 Foundation Programme.

At the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), a Pre-Employment Scheme was introduced in order to entice school leavers and at the same time to help the hospitality industry to develop a skilled work force. This scheme is an on-going scheme, and is in its third year where-in ITS is continuously improving the scheme both with regard to the number of students joining ITS or the number of employees in the food service and/or housekeeping operations sections. One of the positive aspects of this scheme is that it involves practical classes, an element which is welcomed by students, particularly those who are not academically inclined and prefer a more hands on approach towards learning.

(d)   Career Lessons, Learning Expo and Job Exposure Initiatives for 4th Formers – National and College Level[114]

Research suggests that ESLs often cite lack of work and life relevance of their schooling as a factor for dropping out. One aspect of the programme consisted of a set of lessons which were based on discussions, power point presentations, role-play and exercises (group and individual) carried out on a workbook that is distributed to each student. The themes focuses on self-awareness (particularly awareness of external influences upon personal choices, as well as awareness of personal values, interests and skills), job-market awareness (local and global, as well as skills associated with employability), life-long and life-wide learning, post-secondary education pathways, and practical issues such as sitting for an interview and compiling a CV.

A second aspect of the programme included the organisation of Learning Expos by the Education Psycho-Social Services in conjunction with the MEDE in order to promote Lifelong Learning and Further Education through the participation of Vocational and Post-Secondary Schools/Institutions and Training Institutions. The programme enables all those students who wish to pursue further their studies, from 5th form students to graduates, and adults considering a return to studying, to acquaint themselves with the wealth of learning opportunities available.

A third aspect of the programme adopted for retaining young people in the school system is through job exposure experiences which provide students with an opportunity to understand this link between what they are learning in school and work opportunities beyond schooling. Such measures, it is believed, will result in more students who are likely to attend to their class work and build a positive mental image of their future.

(e)   Introducing Life Long Learning through a Pilot Out Reach Programme[115]

The aim of such measure is to provide:

- A different experience to previous learning paths, since these paths might have failed in the education of particular learners.

- The adequate level and type of learning (whether general or vocational).

- The appropriate style of learning (tailor-made to the needs and strengths of individual learners).

114 Ibid
115 Ibid

- The most feasible time for learning (e.g. during school hours for mothers).

- The most convenient place for learning, close to one's place of residence.

- A welcome environment for learning, with other learners from one's own community.

Although this pilot project was envisaged to start in 2013, implementation has actually commenced in October 2010. In January 2010, the Directorate for Life Long Learning (DLLL) established a formal collaboration with the Department for Local Government, focusing in particular on the standards and quality of these courses. The 18-hour of training includes on-site monitoring and mentoring of adult educators rendering such service at any particular locality. Training also includes the working procedures as well as the continuous assessment of adult learners and the final assessment. Participants in these courses will achieve a General Education Award. The MQCI accredited this General Education Award (15 credits) at level 1 of the MQF and of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning.

In 2011-2012, 42 Local Councils participated in this scheme, and delivered classes in Spanish, German, French, Maltese and English literacy, Italian, Numeracy Classes, Maltese as a Foreign Language, and Health, Wellbeing and Successful Ageing. 1,063 adult learners registered for lifelong learning courses – resulting in a four times increase over 2008. All these courses lead to a MQF Level 1 qualification, and during 2010-2011, 356 adult learners achieved a school leaving certificate level qualification or MQF Level 1.

The NRP further recommended that planned measures it will embark on or strengthen further include the following[116]:

- Introduce a blended learning approach.

- Introduce two different procedures to assess learners' prior learning, prior and current work experience.

- Render VET education more relevant and attractive.

- Open opportunities for persons with disabilities to partake in employment.
- Introduce programmes at certification and beyond in disciplines encompassing the following economic sectors: aviation, pharmaceutical, financial services, crafts and creative industries, business process outsourcing and shared services, and industrial electro-mechanical engineering.

In terms of the Europe2020 Strategy Flagship initiatives on education with particular regard to ESL the NRP underlines that the Government has embarked on the following strategies[117]:

(i) Preventive: Directed to tackle problems even before any symptoms have appeared, are being implemented from the pre-school level onwards. This will be addressed through the reform of the NCF which is discussed later in this document.

(ii) Intervention: As shown above measures are to provide targeted support to students at risk as well as reaching out to all students in general.

(iii) The strengthening of the VET education sector as alternative pathway to students.

(iv) Setting up of a Sector Skills Committee comprising of stakeholders directed to formulate policies, procedures, criteria, standards, guidelines etc for informal and non-formal learning.

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116 Ibid
117 Ibid

02.3   European Commission Assessment of the 2012 National Reform Programme

In May 2012, the EC carried out an assessment of the 2012 national reform programme. The assessment recognises that with regard to the tackling of ESL, Malta made a number of commitments in its NRF programme as presented in the section above. Be that as it may, the EC underlines that whilst the initiatives underway demonstrate that the government and the education divisions and the educational institutions are aware of this challenge it is, imperative, that a national strategy on ESL is designed by the end of 2012.

02.4   Position of European Commission on the Development of Partnership Agreement and Programmes in Malta for the Period 2014-2020

In December 2012, the EC presented its recommendations with regard to measures that Malta should consider to direct financing towards to for the 2014-2020 Multiannual Financial Framework. The report re-iterates the priority of addressing the reduction of early school leavers. The EC recommends that the following should be established as priorities under the Cohesion Structural funds (CSF)[118]:

- Development of a system to analyse and monitor the reasons leading to the high incidence of ESLs and the implementation of evidence based comprehensive and consistent strategies to reduce ESL encompassing early prevention, intervention, and compensation measures.

- Improve the quality and access of education at all levels including early childhood education and care and the development of a better quality assurance and monitoring system.

- Investment in the development of early childhood infrastructure.

- Enhancement of links between education and labour market needs, and promotions of access of young people to VET education.

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118 Position of the Commission Services on the development of Partnership Agreement and programmes in Malta for the period 2014-2020, Ref. Ares(2012) 1335362, 13th November 2012

03

A Strategic Approach with regards to Early School Leavers

03. A Strategic Approach with regards to Early School Leavers

The EC underlines that improving the quality of education in individual schools and at system level helps all students at the same time as reducing the risk of a student dropping-out. It establishes a framework, presented in the Figure below, as a guide on how strategies with regard to ESL are to be designed.

The strategic framework is based on the following blocks[119]:

(a) **Identification, Monitoring and Coordination**: This recognises that the factors triggering ESL range from the individual to the social and from the immediate sphere of the pupil / student (family, peers) to the wider society. Those linked to the education system itself can also extend from the individual school to the overall structure of the education system and the opportunities that it offers. Strategies for combating ESL, therefore, have to take as a starting point an analysis of the national, regional and local specificities of the phenomenon. It further underlines the importance of collecting and up-dating national, regional and municipal data given that design needs to be based on precise information in order to design better policies and improved targeted measures.

(b) **Prevention**: This part of the framework seeks to tackle the problem even before the first symptoms of it are visible. Prevention measures look at pre-conditions for successful schooling and the design of education and training systems. The aim is to remove systematic obstacles. Preventive strategies centre on early childhood education and care and structural features within education and training systems.

(c) **Intervention**: Such strategies aim to avoid ESL by improving the quality of education and training and providing targeted support to pupils or groups of pupils at risk. School-wide strategies address all pupils, but are especially beneficial to those at risk of dropping-out. They look at school development in general, early warning systems and networks with outside actors to support the work of the school.

(d) **Compensation**: Such strategies seek to create opportunities for those who left education and training prematurely, but want to gain the qualifications they missed at a later stage in their life. The aim is also to reintegrate young adults in danger of social exclusion by offering a range of tailor-made education and training opportunities. While avoiding drop-out altogether is the better outcome, the second chance route is an important option offers an essential opportunity to continue education and training for those who have left mainstream education early.

Figure 22:   **Framework with regard to the Design of Strategies directed to Tackle Early School Leavers[120]**

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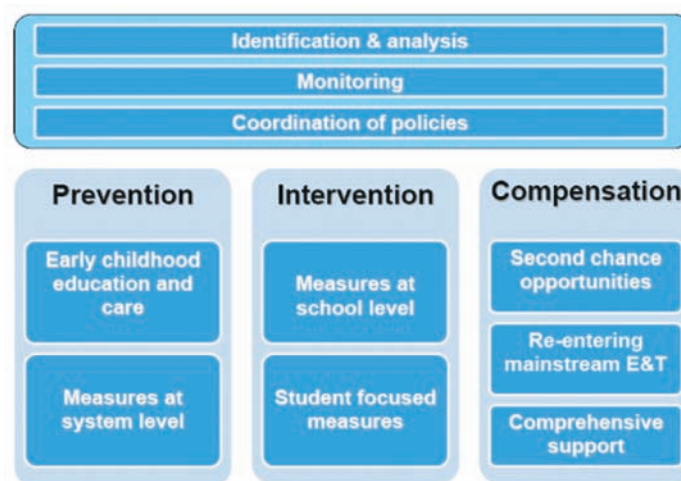
119 Commission Staff Working Paper, Reducing Early School Leaving: Accompanying Document to the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Policies to Reduce Early School Leaving, http://ec.europa .eu /education/school-education/doc/earlywp_en.pdf
120 Ibid

It is to be noted, that strategic measures and actions often fulfil preventative functions and intervene in processes at the same time; they compensate for missed learning and are also relevant for pupils in compulsory education. Whilst the design of this document will seek to follow the EC framework it is pertinent to underline that the categorisation of measures is not always unambiguous and there are clear overlaps between the different measures.

03.1   Good Practice Principles

Although, as discussed earlier and as will be presented in this Chapter, the reduction of ESL is at the heart of system wide reforms that have been carried out in the past years as well as the new NCF, this study has not been able to identify a clear policy statement on the basis of which a strategic framework is designed, actions identified, and subsequently implemented.

This, report therefore recommends the following policy principles which should guide Malta's strategic response to ESL:

- ESL is a symptom of a wider range of issues affecting the lives of children, their families and their communities and the structure and content of the school system. Given the complex range of issues contributing to ESL efforts to address the issue should be sustained and based on a critical mass that allows for a coordinated collaborative holistic approach that is multi-level and includes parents, families and support networks.

- Colleges and schools, and particularly those in the State education sector, should be directed to take a proactive and supportive approach in addressing ESL and undertake all efforts including engaging stakeholders to resolve the issues with their respective school and supporting community.

- The strive to secure a multi-stakeholder approach should be supported by mobilising and resourcing parental and NGO and local community groups so that these can muster the appropriate capacity to work with students who are at risk of disengaging or have disengaged from school.

- The necessary structures should be embedded in the education system, particularly within the State education sector, to allow for the early identification of pupils and students who may be struggling or underachieving in meeting the learning outcomes so that early intervention, particularly within the school itself, is embarked upon.

- The necessary structures should be in place to allow for timely and accessible responses with an emphasis of pro-activity in order to minimise the incidence of children and young people at risk of disengaging, or disengaged, from school.

- The importance of recognising that the 'academic' route to learning is not the only pathway to success and that the education system should be sufficiently flexible and balanced to allow students with varied interests, needs and abilities to embark on individualised and vocational pathways which will too lead students to success.

- The education system should be designed in a manner that will allow them to attain a form of reporting even if they drop out early of school should could form the foundation for their potential re-entry.

03.2   Strengthening the Structures to Meet the Challenge of Early School Leaving

Early School Leaving is a horizontal issue. It transcends amongst others, education, inclusivity, family, children and youth, youth delinquency and crime, social services policies to mention a few policy domains. Within each of these policy domains operate departments and agencies. Moreover, other key stakeholders are parents, youth and student organisation, NGOs and social partners, including local council given particular district and town specific issues that direct impact students dropping out of schools.

What this signifies is that policy cohesion and consistency in policy and strategy design and subsequent implementation will be far more difficult to achieve – as inevitably each domain has inherent vertical priorities which may not necessarily converge with those prevailing in the other domains. Moreover, unnecessary administrative overlap and potential turf protection as well as the need to align and coordinate resources across the multiple stakeholders in order to avoid duplication and ensure a holistic approach to tackle root issues is a challenge that has to be overcome in the design of policy and strategy, in securing agreement, and subsequently ensuring implementation.

In this regard, the report recommends that whilst the lead Ministry with regard to addressing the ESL should be the Ministry that is responsible for the education portfolio it suggests the constitution of an Inter-Ministerial Committee (IMC) that would be stewarded by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education with the mandate to:

- Assess and approve strategies, policies and actions directed to address the challenge of ESL.

- Ensure that ESL and inter-related issues and proposed actions include parental, NGO and other stakeholder involvement to secure that an 'inclusive' approach is adopted as a matter of course.

- Ensure that all government entities that have a direct or indirect role in matters relating to ESL and related issues provide unconditional support and corporation in the working of the IMC and the implementing entities.

- Ensure that all government stakeholders work together in a coordinate, coherent and consistent manner in order to ensure that students are provided with a 360° support network.

The IMC should be constituted of senior representatives of appropriate government agencies as well as representatives from NGOs, parents, Church and Independent colleges and schools amongst others.

Strategic Action 01

- The report recommends that whilst the Ministry responsible for education continues to act as the lead agency given the fact that Early School Leaving transcends multiple policy domains an Inter-Ministerial Committee should be set up. The Inter-Ministerial Committee should be chaired by the Permanent Secretary responsible for education and represented by senior officials of appropriate government entities as well as NGOs, non-State schools, parents, etc. The Inter-Ministerial Committee will (i) assess and approve strategies, policies and actions directed to address the challenge of Early School Leaving; (ii) ensure that Early School Leaving and inter-related issues and proposed actions include parental, NGO and other stakeholder involvement to secure that an 'inclusive' approach is adopted as a matter of course; (iii) ensure that all government entities that have a direct or indirect role in matters relating to Early School Leaving and related issues provide unconditional support and corporation in the working of the Inter-Ministerial Committee and the implementing entities; and (iv) **ensure that all government stakeholders work together in a coordinate, coherent and consistent manner in order to ensure that students are provided with a 360° support network.**

Whilst the report is cognisant of the fact that whilst the MEDE is investing in building capacity within schools with regard to counsellors and social and welfare offices it is of the considered opinion that there is merit in creating a new function with the mandate to own and steward responses to the ESL challenge. The report underlines that

given the importance of ESL as a strategic issue the locus of responsibility for a new organisational structure with the responsibility for ESL should rest with the Office of the Permanent Secretary. This will ensure that the Unit will have the maximum administrative support – a critical success factor given the myriad of government organisations that interact in some form or other with the issue of ISL.

The setting up of an Early School Leavers Monitoring Unit (ESLMU) within the Office of the Permanent Secretary would ensure that a sustained resource base is in place that can:

- Lead and works with relevant entities within the Ministry for Education and external to it to ensure that the framework related to the collecting and up-dating of national, regional and local data and information is strengthened so that high quality analysis and monitoring is carried out.

- Carry out on-going monitoring of strategies, policies and programmes under implementation; analyse their impact and performance, and on the basis of empirical evidence submit recommendations for their improvement.

- Responsible for the ESL strategy and its implementation.

- Responsible for the governance arrangements to manage education provision for children and young people at risk of disengaging or disengaged from school.

- Provide consultation and assistance to colleges and schools in developing ESL prevention programmes.

- Provide consultation and assistance to colleges and schools in implementing ESL prevention programmes.

- Work with the central agencies as well as colleges, schools to ensure that teacher involvement must be at the centre of integrated responses to tackle educational disadvantage and the need to develop mechanisms of how the engagement of teachers is to be facilitated given the demands of their job.

- Bring together all government departments and agencies to ensure a coherent and congruent approach.

- Work with NGOs, constituted bodies, educators, and other stakeholders to developed structured mechanisms to tackle the challenge of ESL.

- Seeks to promote partnership between parents, teachers and community in order to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system.

- Ensure that best practice ESL prevention programmes introduced locally by colleges and schools are identified and potentially replicated elsewhere within the State education sector.

- Identify best practice approaches to ESL prevention programmes overseas that can be customised for application in Malta.

- Establish networks overseas entities involved in ESL prevention programmes and tap resources as appropriate.

- Prepare applications for funding requests for ESL prevention programmes under the 2014-2020 ESF financing instrument amongst others.

- Monitor progress in implementing the structures and processes outlined in this framework.

- Create the basis for consistent and empirical evidence for design of policies related to ESL.

> ### Strategic Action 02
>
> The report recommends the constitution of an Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit reporting to the Office of the Permanent Secretary within the Ministry of Education and Employment. The Unit would be responsible for ensuring an integrated systematic, sustained, cohesive and coordinated approach to the addressing of the challenge of Early School Laving.

It is further proposed that the ESLMU establishes an Advisory Early School Leaving Board (AESLB) to assist local schools better to support at risk children and young people, and enable consistency in decision making where access to flexible learning options is being sought. The AESLB, which will be chaired by the ESLMU will be comprised of senior practitioners (principals, leading teachers, student support coordinators, primary welfare officers, student support services officers, and other agencies as appropriate and will work with the college and schools to:

- Determine the needs of children and young people at risk of disengaging or disengaged given the specific local conditions.

- Ensure that pro-active preventive measures are in place.

- Monitor referral cases to the Learning Zones and determine what action is required within the college or school to reduce such referrals.

- Identify need for professional development for teachers, student support coordinators, primary welfare officers, student support services officers and others working with children and young people at risk.

- Establish parents, family and community networks that would work with colleges and schools to tackle and prevent ESL.

- Establish support mechanisms that parents, families and carer may require to better support the child or young person.

> ### Strategic Action 03
>
> The report recommends the constitution of an Advisory Early School Leaving Board that will work with Colleges and Schools to assist them in determining the needs of children and young people at risk of disengaging or disengaged and to help them develop preventive measures that are specific local conditions directed to reduce referral to Learning Zones to the absolute minimum.

There is no doubt that one of the best ways to assist early school leavers is to help prevent young people from leaving school early. Due to the schools duty of care and an increased focus on the holistic care of young people, schools are under increased pressure to address the range of social, psychological and personal issues affecting young people. This report recognises that multi-disciplinary resources within colleges are being strengthened to address students at risk of disengagement through skill acquisition and formation to youths thus preventing future absenteeism.

It is pertinent to underline that the feedback to the draft NCF one specific recommendation presented is that the final post consultation NCF document should emphasise the role of youth workers who are seen to play an important role, especially in Learning Zones. It is stated that the final NCF document should not only emphasise the importance of the youth worker but should also re-visit it to enable it to embrace other important activities that youth workers can carry out on behalf of colleges and schools vis-a-vis the strengthening of the relationship between the college and school and the parents and local community. It was stated that give their formation, youth workers are well equipped with the requisite *"forma mentis"* and specialist skills to take on a more leading role in building a network between colleges and schools and the parents and families of the students and the community.[121]

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121 Analysis of Feedback to the Consultation Process on the Draft National Curriculum Framework, Final Report, Ministry of Education and Employment, August 2012

The report, whilst agreeing that youth services are in an ideal position to provide support to at-risk young people given that they have a unique responsibility within communities to attempt to reconcile formal and non-formal education, is cognisant that the National Referral System has been strengthened through the inclusion of youth workers in the colleges which has brought about the start of a variety of programmes within the colleges.

The report recommends that the relationship between the youth worker and the multi-disciplinary teams working within colleges and the proposed ESLMU should be strengthened to the extent possible. The strategy recommends that a formal structured relationship is established between the ESLMU and the entity responsible for youth workers so that a collaborative holistic approach is institutionalised in order to:

• Bring together all those stakeholders who working with and around the child or young person, and very often, their family.

• Use of care team approach, involving undertaking assessment, planning and intervention in collaboration with the child and family, social workers and others with the particular skills to address the young person's needs.

• Integrate youth workers who will assume the role of a case manager who offers individual attention and reasonable intensity of support.

• Collaborate with teachers, working side by side, with a social worker or other staff.

• Adopt systematic, outcomes based services.

In this manner, a collaborative holistic approach will aim to promote self-confidence and self-esteem, develop life and problem solving skills, practise social skills, link the child or young person into appropriate community services, and ultimately facilitate the young person's engagement in education.[122] Other positive outcomes for children and young people receiving such support include increased school or work engagement and attendance.[123]

Strategic Action 04

The report is of the considered view that youth workers have a unique responsibility within communities to attempt to reconcile formal and non-formal education and recommends that a formal structured relationship is established between the Early School Leavers Monitoring Unit and the agency responsible for youth workers where-in the youth worker is established as the kernel around whom a collaborative holistic approach is introduced that brings together all those stakeholders who working with and around the child or young person, and very often, their family.

The report agrees with the initiative introduced by MEDE to establish absenteeism and truancy as one of the early warning mechanisms which, in turn, is supported by a multi-disciplinary support approach that includes teachers, school management, guidance officer, social workers, youth workers, and nurses tasked to identify children and youths how may be at risk of disengaging from the education system and to take early remedial action.

The report underlines that it is important that not only are students in risk of disengagement from the educational system identified but that they are identified as early as possible in order to prevent any interruption of schooling which is likely to arise as a result of repeated absenteeism. Thus, the report is of the considered opinion that the important steps undertaken to date to enable colleges within the State sector to identify and respond to children and youths who are at risk through the appointment of a skilled multi-disciplinary resource base operating within a college's network should be consolidated and strengthened further.

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122 State of California Board of Corrections 2002, Repeat Offender Prevention Program, State of California Board of Corrections
123 Kamradt 2001, cited in Youth Studies Australia 2007, Success with wraparound: a comprehensive, individualised, integrated and strength-based model, available at, http://ww.ysa .org.au accessed 1 May 2009

Strategic Action 05

The report recommends the continued development of allocation of multi-skilled resources to colleges within the State sector and to increase the speed with which this development is taking place so that colleges are able to early identify and respond to children and youths who are at risk.

The understanding gained in the drafting of this report is that colleges and schools within the State Sector have limited funds, if at all, to allow them to introduce school based prevention measures for children and young people in need of additional support. The majority of the funding is provided to DSS within ESD which was voted a recurrent expenditure of €238,000 in 2013 and a programmes and initiative vote of €2.23m which consists of €1.3m for St Patrick's Industrial School and €1m for the Special Education Programme.[124]

The centralisation of financing with DSS, particularly given that colleges and schools within the State education sector have no authority to raise revenue other than through fund raising initiatives, means that college and school based attempts towards ESL prevention matters are constrained – depending on the ability of a Principal or a Head of School to raise funds from the local community, fund raising or through participation in programmes.

Whilst this strategy recommends that a central stewardship approach through the setting up of the proposed ESLMU is an appropriate model for Malta in order to limit fragmentation and to enable a critical mass to accrue to take forward ESL prevention measures, the report, however, underlines the importance of specific prevention measures that are undertaken at a local level – particularly given the fact that colleges and schools in different districts and localities have unique characteristics that result in a higher incidence of ESLs.

Given the current financing framework the approach proposed in this report with regard to colleges and schools adopting a proactive approach within their respective networks and campuses are not realisable unless financing is decentralised and made available.

In this regard different types of financing models can be followed: funds that are decentralised at a college network; funds that are decentralised at a school level; allocation of financing to an individual student, allocation of financing to a particular preventive mechanism, allocation of financing on the basis of placement allocation to mention a few.

The report recommends that a vote item for ESL is introduced under the ESLMU both with regard to operations expenditure as well as to programmes and initiatives. The programmes and initiative votes would should be subsequently split into two – part of the fund would be owned by the ESLMU itself in order to provide it with the financial resources that will allow it to introduce prevention mechanisms that may be appropriate for implementation in more than one college or school; whilst the other would be decentralised to a college network for administration and use across the schools resident within it and thereby allowing for locality specific ESL prevention mechanisms to be introduced.

Additionally, as stated earlier in this report, the ESLMU will seek to extend the financial resources available for ESL preventive initiatives by applying for external financing such as the ESF amongst others as well as through the setting up of networks with NGOs and other stakeholders in the community as well as nationally.

Strategic Action 06

The report recommends a two tier level of financing is required to be allocated to a new programme and initiative line item within the Ministry of Education and Employment where part of the financial vote will rest with the Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit to enable it to fund prevention mechanisms that may be appropriate for implementation in more than one college or school; whilst the other part would be decentralised to a college network for administration and use across the schools resident within it and thereby allowing for locality specific Early School Leaving prevention mechanisms to be introduced.

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124 http://finance.gov.mt/image.aspx?site=MFIN&type=estimate&ref=881

The report recognises the difficulty of rendering the financial resources across the 10 College networks within the current financial state of play as Malta seeks to reduce its deficit and debt levels.

In this regard, it recommends that initially, funding for localised ESL preventive measures should be confined to those colleges, within the State education sector, operating in districts or areas that have major issues with regard to children and young people at risk who are disengaging or disengaged from school – thereby, ensuring that although financing may be constrained this is concentrated towards addressing the issue on a pareto basis as against fragmenting the funds across 10 colleges and thereby reducing the potential impacts. It further recommends, that in so far that this is possible, such financing is secured through the closing down of policy measures currently undertaken by the MEDE which are not rendering the results sought or may no longer be relevant.

Additionally, the direction of financing could be such that it grafts on existing projects such as for example the Cottonera Resource Centre introduced by the University of Malta which seeks to address potential ESLs coming from areas which are more at risk of inactivity and unemployment are followed through a three-tier system of support, training and mentoring. The combination of such activities will not only allow for a holistic and integrated approach but through the combination of different financing resources will provide the project with a greater opportunity to render a pervasive impact.

Strategic Action 07

The report recommends that given Malta's deficit management measures, funds for localised Early School Leaving measures should be confined to those colleges, within the State education sector, operating in districts or areas that have major issues with regard to children and young people at risk who are disengaging or disengaged from school or grafted onto initiatives carried out by other stakeholders already underway thereby not only allowing for a holistic and integrated approach but through the combination of different financing resources will provide the project with a greater opportunity to render a pervasive impact.

In determining the financing that is to be directed towards ESL prevention measures it is important to underline that research shows that for each additional upper secondary graduate, total lifetime public savings connected to this graduate amount to US$ 209,000, based on estimated extra tax revenues, health-, crime-, and welfare savings. Given that the cost of delivering successful preventive programmes (which aim to raise graduation rates) vary between US$ 59,000 and US$ 143,600 implementing the median intervention would entail benefits that are 2.5 times greater than the costs, showing that there are clear economic benefits connected to raising the educational attainment level.[125]

03.3   Identification, Monitoring and Coordination

It is difficult, to design and formulate a robust strategic framework in the absence of quality data. The positive work that has been undertaken recently by the Ministry in conjunction with the NSO in strengthening the statistical framework should, in the opinion of this report, be continued and potentially at a faster pace.

The most recent published official data and information available – other than data of ESL that is generated by the Ministry itself – on education related statistics is the report issued by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in 2011 which covers the respective scholastic years 2006 / 2007 and 2007 / 2008.

This report argues that MEDE should seek to complement the work carried by NSO by taking a more active role with regard to the generation, and publication of statistics, related to education, The report argues that this could be achieved by means of a two pronged. First, the current department responsible for research and development that supports both the DQSE and DSE is reconstituted as the Department for Research and Statistics and is repositioned to functionally report to the DQSE.

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125 Lyche, C. (2010), Taking on the completion challenge: A literature review on policies to prevent dropout and early school leaving. OECD Education Working Papers. No. 53. Paris: OECD Publishing

Second, it should work with the NSO to introduce a robust and structured statistical methodological framework, that conforms to methodological standards set by NSO and Eurostat, for the on-going collation of key data sets within the education sector.

It is pertinent to note, that the afore mentioned NSO report on education statistics provides no relevant data and information with regard to the background of ESL, the schools they attend, the districts they hail for, the reasons why they have left school early, etc. Moreover, the SEC and MATSEC reports whilst showing the respective number of applicant registrations for each examination by district do not present information with regard to the pass ratio from each district to enable a further composite study of issues arising due to geographical locations.

This is of key importance as a strategic approach to address the issue of ESL should not only look at national measures but should also seek to understand geographical and community issues and design and implement ad hoc measures in their regard. As shown earlier in this report, where available data and information stems from specific research initiatives rather than the systematic collection of data these will allow for proper interpretation and intelligence leading to targeting strategic responses.

The importance of collecting, as a minimum, systematic data on a district approach for strategic design includes:

• The identification of districts that suffer disproportionately from problems which may place mainstream programmes under pressure so that they operate less effectively than in other, more affluent areas and something 'extra' is therefore needed.

• Problems overlap in districts and they are often made worse when they all co-exist together; the sheer scale of the difficulties means that extra and target specific action is needed.

• Focusing of strategic activity on small areas with high ESL issues within district boundaries can, potentially, make more of an impact than if resources are dissipated.

• Allowing for the design of local ad hoc measures with local schools, NGOs and other stake holders as well as national authorities that will consist of a 'bottom up' approach which is underpinned by partnerships.

• The undertaking of tracer studies which follows and guides young people from compulsory schooling to the age of twenty-four so that a longitudinal analysis of young people on their transition following compulsory education can be drawn up.

Given the strategic importance to Malta's continued economic and social development of ensuring that the nation's human capital is developed in order that it can positively and social contribute this reports recommends that it is imperative that MEDE and NSO work together to develop the necessary ESL statistical framework to enable for the regular collation of data and its interpretation to design effect policies and strategic action in this regard as well as to allow for continuous monitoring and evaluation of policies and strategic action during implementation in order to gauge their effectiveness and allow for timely calibration as and when appropriate.

Thus, the report adds, that the statistical framework that should be designed should address the following important data elements:

• National, district and town level within district.

• College or school attended by ESL and categorisation of college or school by State, Church or Independent.

• Qualification level of attainment of school leaver.

• Economic status of family of ESL as well as the ESL him or herself.

• Economic status of ESL by level of qualification.

• Employment activities of ESL – including inactivity.

• Earnings of ESL.

Given the fact that the reduction of ESL is one of the key performance targets that Malta is to meet in the implementation of the Europe2020 Strategy the report recommends that MEDE explores the possibility of securing funding under the EU 2014-2020 multi-financing framework to develop the statistical framework proposed in this report. Additionally, MEDE should also seek to assign funding under the European Social Fund (ESF) for the undertaking of targeting and specific research with regard to different aspects of the economic-social as well as externalities dynamics effecting ESL so that it can be in a position to design and implement tailored specific policy instruments.

03.4   Preventative Strategic Measures to Address Early School Leaving

Research[126] identifies the school environment as central as to whether a young person completes his or her schooling – where-in schools may result in relationships between teachers and students which lead to an absence of trust and respect for young people unable to engage students meaningfully in learning; etc. As important is the way the curriculum is designed and the pedagogical approach to teaching and learning which is more focused on content rather than knowledge, on academia rather than competencies and skills, and which may be perceived as boring to both students who struggle to meet developmental and education expectations as well as students who are high achievers.

School wide interventions focus largely on a range of curricular innovations, for instance the introduction of more vocational and technical education, or greater cooperation with other agencies, including workplaces. There is considerable emphasis on the need to move from subject-based to skills-based curriculum and the recognition of key competences. School organisation that recognises the particular needs of potential ESL can be successful in

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126 Includes Smyth, J., An argument for new understandings and explanations of early school leaving that go beyond the conventional, London Review of Education, 3(2), 2005; Smyth, J., and Hattam, R., Early school leaving and cultural geography of high schools, British Educational Research Journal, 28(3), 2002; Lee, T., and Breen, L., Young people's perceptions and experiences of leaving school early. An exploration. Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology, 17, 2007

reducing the incidence of early leaving. It is possible to identify key elements of disengagement from school, and devise appropriate responses to them.[127]

Ferguson et al, 2005, Kendall and Kinder, 2005 and ReStart, 2007, cited in 'Early School Leaving: Lessons from Research for Policy Makers' identify the following as curriculum factors resulting in student disengagement:

• Perceived irrelevance of curriculum.

• Prescribed academic curriculum.

• Lock-in to inappropriate vocational / academic courses.

• Reduction in pastoral time as a result of curriculum pressure.

• Inappropriate pedagogy – focus on curriculum content rather than learners.

• Incompatible learner and school norms.

• Lack of alternative education provision with formalised accreditation.

It is pertinent to note, that in the feedback presented to the draft NCF all of the above of curriculum disengagement factors were raised and to which curriculum reform was proposed.[128]

Curricular reforms advanced to reduce the possibility of ESL both relate to increasing the subjective relevance of education for young people, and respond to needs for external recognition by employers and further education and training institutions.[129] Thus, Curriculum reform has been aimed at increasing the relevance of curriculum and qualification. In terms of the first, it calls for policies which address the individual and diverse needs of early school leavers; their individual learning styles and paces; and the diverse contexts in which they work and their differing accreditation needs. It aims to work with the grain of young people's motivations and needs in terms of their social and employment aspirations. One key element that has emerged in this response is the need to shift from subject-based to skills-based curricula, together with an emphasis on the recognition of key competences[130] *and* shifts to outcome focused accreditation; one particular example is curriculum reform working with frameworks of individualised learning pathways as developed in the Netherlands.[131]

Extension of VET is the commonest policy response to the need for curricular reform aimed at reducing ESL. VET has the potential to respond to factors of ESL such as lack of relevance of the curriculum, lack of flexibility, inappropriate pedagogy and the labour market aspirations of young people. VET options often recruit more of the 'discouraged workers' who remain in education and training as a "holding" pattern for want of better options.

Thus in Ireland, for example, curriculum reforms embarked upon in order to meet the varying needs of the student population and to increase retention among at-risk-students the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP) and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCAP) were introduced as an alternative to the traditional Leaving Certificate.[132] These alternatives were introduced for students who might benefit from a more project based, vocationally oriented curriculum – and have been quite successful in retaining young people who might otherwise have left the school system – though they have been criticised with regard to resulting lack of access to tertiary education.[133]

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127 Early School Leaving: Lessons from Research for policy makers, Network of experts in social sciences of education and training, independent report submitted to the European Commission, 2010

128 Analysis of Feedback to the Consultation Process on the Draft National Curriculum Framework, Final Report, Ministry of Education and Employment, August 2012

129 Walther, A. and Pohl, A. (2005), Thematic Study on Policy Measures Concerning Disadvantaged Youth, Study Commissioned by the European Commission, DG Employment and Social Affairs in the Framework of the Community Action Programme to Combat Social Exclusion 2002-2006, Tübingen: Institute for Regional Innovation and Social Research (IRIS).

130 ReStart (2007), Innovative Approaches to ESL in England and Wales, London: Olmec.

131 Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005), Reclaiming Those Disengaged From Education and Learning: A European Perspective, Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research

132 Lalor, K., De Roiste, A., and Devlin M., Young people in contemporary Ireland, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan, 2007

133 Ibid

In Austria, for example, where the vocational route has a higher status and is fully integrated with specific enterprises, the close links between the training provider and the enterprise help to retain more young people. The degree of flexibility of post compulsory education and training opportunities is cited as an important factor in the ability of education and training systems to retain young people beyond the age when compulsory education ends. The variety of vocational schools, intermediate and technical vocational colleges, pre-vocational schools, transition and access courses leading to apprentice training, is identified as a key factor in helping young people find appropriate opportunities to stay in education and training in Austria, Switzerland, Flanders and the Netherlands.[134]

Those vocational approaches which come with a more robust status and pathways, such as those with an apprenticeship model, are more successful. Unemployment rates for apprentices are far below those with only lower secondary education.[135]

As stated in the previous Chapter, the process of streaming, which in Malta's State primary education Cycle used to initiate in Year 4 and thereafter leading to an 11+ examination which would determine whether a student would be streamed towards the Junior College if successful – where the overwhelming majority of students successfully completed their secondary Cycle of education – whereas failure would result in a student being streamed towards the local town schools – where the risks of failing to complete the secondary education cycle were high.

In late 2000 reforms were initiated to remove streaming by introducing differentiated teaching within State colleges and schools directed to integrate students with different abilities within one class room. The reforms were introduced in 2011. The draft NCF document established differentiated teaching as one of the six principles on which Malta's system of education should be based. It is pertinent to underline that during the consultation process whilst general agreement was voiced with regard to the principle that the education system should be based on a differentiated environment concern was expressed that for such a system to be successfully implemented investment is required with regard to capacity building; increased teacher resource allocation; improved teacher to student ratio; less syllabus content; more flexibility to a teacher with regard to his / her approach in the classroom environment; that such an environment may negatively affect high flyers.[136]

As will be shown later in this Chapter, in the final NCF document these concerns are taken on board and in certain instances implementation action is already underway.

This document supports the reforms carried out with regard to the removal of streaming at the end of the primary Cycle of education as well as the establishment of a differentiated teaching environment as a principle of the education system. Research identifies streaming as a factor resulting in ESL, whereby students in the 'bottom' stream disengage and have their educational potential curtailed; such students are more commonly boys, and students from disadvantaged backgrounds.[137] This is a positive move that should result in a reduction of ESLs. Research suggests that, for example, the Nordic strategy for building up both high quality and equality in education resulting in relatively low ESL rates is based on constructing a publicly funded comprehensive school system without selecting, tracking or streaming students during basic education until the age of 16.[138]

Strategic Action 10

The report underlines that the removal of the streaming process at the end of the primary Cycle of education and the principle espoused in the National Curriculum Framework with regard to the institutionalisation of a differentiated teaching environment, which should be maintained and implemented, should result in a lower rate of Early School Leavers.

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134 Kendall, S. and Kinder, K. (2005), Reclaiming Those Disengaged From Education and Learning: A European Perspective, Slough: National Foundation for Educational Research

135 GHK (2005), Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills and Early School Leavers: Final Report, DG EAC 38/04, Brussels: DG EAC, http://ec.europa.eu/education/pdf/doc284_en.pdf

136 Analysis of Feedback to the Consultation Process on the Draft National Curriculum Framework, Final Report, Ministry of Education and Employment, August 2012

137 First Report: Staying in Education: A New Way Forward, First Report, Joint Committee on Education and Skills, Houses of the Oireachtas, May 2010

138 Study on Access to Education and Training, Basic Skills, and Early School Leavers, Lot 3: Early School Leavers, Final Report submitted by GHK to the European Commission, September 2005

In Malta, as stated earlier in Chapter 03 of this report, a draft NCF was placed in the public domain for public consultation – which was completed in December 2011. A comprehensive analysis of the feedback received from all stakeholders were placed in the public domain on 14th August 2012.[139] In August 2012 the Minister for Education appointed a Post Consultation Working Committee[140] to review the consultation feedback and to present the final NCF document. The Committee completed its work in October, and the final NCF document was presented to Cabinet in November 2012 – where-in it was subsequently approved.

The final NCF document underlines that the overarching principle upon which the framework is constructed is that of giving children and young people an adequate entitlement of learning that enables them to accomplish their full potential as individual persons and as citizens. With specific reference to ensuring that learners develop to the maximum of their potential it introduces the following principles[141]:

(i) The principle of the continuum of achievement directed to allow a learner to follow, from amongst different education pathways, the best pathway that will allow him or her to reach the maximum of his or her potential - irrespective of whether the student is a high flyer, has average abilities, basic abilities or has a disability. The NCF thus seeks to "establish a framework that would assume, to the extent possible, that no student becomes a casualty of an education system that is unable to identify those learners who require encouragement and guidance and that allows for the introduction of different pathways that will truly allow a learner to develop his or her abilities in the manner best suited for him or her.

(ii) A learner-centred learning that would see that the content programmes of learning of the Learning Areas of the Junior and Secondary Cycle of education will be streamlined according to realities of the school year to enable educators to assure that the pedagogy is inquiry-based, integrated with the cross-curricular themes and supported by an e-Learning based approach.

> **Strategic Action 11**
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> The report underlines that the principles of education with regard to the continuum of achievement and learner centred learning stemming presented by the new National Curriculum Reforms are important kernels that should result in a reduction of Early School Leavers from the education system.

In discussing the aims of education, the Post Consultation Working Committee emphasised that In today's complex world the reality is that the economic, social, political, and environment ripples of nations at the other end of the world have a quasi-immediate and pervasive impact on Malta's well-being. In face of such a reality the contribution of Malta's education system towards the development of learners who can manage such global affects by having the necessary knowledge, competencies and skills to allow them to re-skill themselves and have increased mobility becomes imperative.

Equally importantly, the Working Committee asserts, the fact that an education system that equips tomorrow's future adults with knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values to make the transition to employment will be more likely to secure a state of play which allows them to enjoy a quality of life based on their self-worth. Securing the values, knowledge, competencies and skills to enjoy employment is, also, a form of social justice as it ensures that students do not run the risk of becoming dependent on the State for their well-being because the education system would have failed them.[142]

> **Strategic Action 12**
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> The report supports the thrust in the new National Curriculum Framework that a fundamental aim of the education system should be that of ensuring that students develop the competencies, skills, attitudes and values as well as the ability to re-skill and up-skill to strengthen student's opportunities for employment and more importantly value added employment as well as labour mobility. This aim of education together with the principle of individual development pathways as well as the introduction of Vocational Educational Training in compulsory education should result in a reduction of Early School Leavers from the education system.

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139 https://www.education.gov.mt/Page.aspx?pid=543
140 One of drafters of this document was part of this Committee and was primarily responsible for Part I of the document that introduces the final National Curriculum Framework and which is quoted in the next coming pages.
141 A National Curriculum Framework for All, Ministry of Education and Employment, 2013
142 Ibid

This report supports the approach adopted by the Working Committee to integrate the Early Years Cycle from KGI up to Year 2 of what is currently known as the primary Cycle of education. This integration will ensure continuity in the development of the child between KGI to Year 2 at his or her pace of learning and thereby allowing for late developers to integrate in the system. Additionally integrating the period between the kindergarten years and Years 1 and 2 allows for the design of a seamless learning outcomes framework for the Early Years. This will minimise the existing transition problems between KGII and Year 1 (strongly emphasised in the consultation feedback) due to the considerable stepping-up that learners are expected to make in Year 1.

This reform, together with the introduction of, at least, twice yearly profiling reports during the Early Years Cycle will introduce a structured framework where students who are struggling to meet the learning outcomes at the end of the said cycle can be identified and provided with the appropriate guidance and encouragement is provided to such learners at the right time as they move into Year 3 or progress during the Junior School cycle.

Strategic Action 13

The report supports the thrust in the new National Curriculum Framework that introduces an Early Years Cycle (KGI to Y2) to allow for late developers to integrate in a seamless learning outcomes framework as well as the introduction of the carrying out of individual student profiling reports at least twice annually during the said Cycle. This will enable for the structured identification of learners who may be struggling as they move into Year 3 or as they progress within the Junior School Cycle so that the appropriate guidance and encouragement is provided to such learners at the right time and should result in a reduction of Early School Leavers from the education system.

As discussed in Chapter 2, one important aspect of the new curricular reforms is that of supporting the Senior Secondary Cycle of education by a flexible, coherent and diversified curriculum aimed at catering for students' varied interests, needs and abilities. VET learning is part of the senior secondary curriculum. VET learning programmes are introduced as elective subjects within the senior secondary curriculum where-in students' achievement in VET will be reported in the School Leaving Certificate and Profile (SLCP).

The value of VET is to be conferred by the wider community where the conditions which sustain the trust of the community are also those which assure the quality of VET, such as: effective stakeholder involvement, a motivating curriculum, responsive institutions, competent teachers, good careers guidance and student support, and the development of strong linkages to further education and employment.

VET is introduced into the senior secondary curriculum to diversify the learning opportunities available to students. It is intended to enrich the learning experiences of students of varying learning needs, particularly those who will benefit from a strong practical orientation in their learning. This orientation can also be applied to the learning and assessment of the core subjects. VET is an integral part of the senior secondary curriculum, complementing senior secondary subjects by offering studies with stronger elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields.

VET courses should be directed to:

- Provide for a balanced curriculum to cater for students' different interests, learning styles and inclinations.

- Enrich the learning experiences of students of varying learning needs by offering practical contexts and content designed to engage and motivate students who learn who will benefit from a strong practical orientation in their learning.

- Include content that is designed to challenge students and provide options for both academic and career progression.

- Adopt an organising structure of areas of studies relevant to broad trends in vocational studies and the world of work in Malta. Each area of studies provides foundation knowledge and concepts necessary for keeping abreast of knowledge and practices in that area.

The curriculum aims for VET should include:

- Enabling students to understand fundamental theories and concepts through application and practice, and to develop their generic skills in authentic contexts.

- Providing students with opportunities to explore their career aspirations and orientation for life-long learning in specific areas.

To provide a sound leaning platform for students VET programmes should be design according to the core principles of balance, coherence, articulation and responsiveness by means of (i) seeking coherency with the basic foundation of knowledge, skills competencies, attitudes and values of the NCF; (ii) introduction of diverse learning programmes that have not been taught traditionally in schools but which are relevant to the socio-economic-environmental development of Malta; (iii) extended learning environments that are available to senior secondary schools outside of tertiary institutions; (iv) initial experience of the requirement of vocational field which serves as a context to advance more generic learning and prepares students for different post-secondary pathways; (v) an applied and practical context for learning, teaching, project assignments supported by relevant knowledge; and (vi) a similar and consistent approach of substantive learning outcomes as with traditional and academic based subjects.

Through the career-related context of VET courses, students will have the opportunity to become familiar with a variety of professions and occupations. Understanding the knowledge, skills, competencies and workplace requirements within a professional field will help students not only to develop their career aspirations but also provide a new pathway to students who are not comfortable with the current orientation of the academic bias of the current curriculum and therefore reduce the incidence of ESL.

The VET should, therefore, also seek to meet the following career related competencies as an alternative pathway to the academic bias, and only pathway, available in the curriculum today:

- Understanding the knowledge, skills, competencies and workplace requirements within a vocational field; and mastering the knowledge, competencies and skills specific to the studies.

- Understanding and interpreting workplace requirements through practising the basic skills in an authentic or near authentic environment.

- Developing and applying conceptual, practical and reflective skills to demonstrate innovation and entrepreneurship.

Strategic Action 14

The report supports the thrust in the new National Curriculum Framework with regard to the importance of valuing and accrediting VET skills and competencies as a means of providing more diverse pathways of learning leading students into further and higher education as well as well as for providing the prerequisites for employability and mobility to new skills and to new jobs.

Students should also be assisted by guidance and advice from college and school support services to assist them make informed choices among VET courses, in their secondary cycle of education. It is imperative that teachers, parents and students are instilled with the understanding that the selection of a pathway that leads to a VET programme of studies rather than the 'normal expected academic pathway is not a secondary, and therefore, a route that is based on a student's failure to be able to follow the 'expected' academic route that would lead to tertiary education. Thus, the MEDE and the Directorates should work with all stakeholders in order to:

- Provide sufficient guidelines for course providers to design VET courses, while allowing them enough space to innovate using their expertise

- Inform schools and teachers of the nature and structure of VET programmes and the courses offered to facilitate curriculum planning.

- inform students and their parents of the nature of VET courses and the standards embedded within the courses to help them make informed choices.

- Inform employers and the general public of the nature of VET courses and the standards embedded within the courses.

Strategic Action 15

The report recommends that in supporting the introduction of the Vocational Education Training streams in the Secondary Cycle of Education the Ministry of Education and Employment and the relevant Directorates in the said Ministry should (i) provide clear, consistent information to students, parents, teachers, schools, employers and the general public on the importance of the Vocational Education Training as a different pathway directed to allow students to develop their abilities and competencies; and (ii) provide sufficient guidelines for course providers to design Vocational Education Training courses, while allowing them enough space to innovate using their expertise.

The new NCF maintains the position that the initial VET programmes that will be introduced will relate to Engineering; Hospitality; IT Practitioner; and Health and Social Care. Whilst the mobilisation required to develop curricula, train teachers, prepare the necessary pedagogical support tools to introduce a new VET programme cannot be underestimated it is, nevertheless, argued that for the VET programme to constitute a viable pathway of learning leading students into further and higher education as well as well as for providing the prerequisites for employability and mobility to new skills and to new jobs a more comprehensive portfolio of VET courses should be introduced.

The new NCF whilst underlining that during the life time of the new curriculum new VET courses will be introduced it provides neither an induction of the courses that will be selected nor the timing of when such courses will be introduced. In this regard, this report emphasises that MEDE should work with the necessary stakeholders in order to identify the VET areas that should be targeted – thereby ensuring a correlation between the VET subjects thought and employment – design a timetable for when they will be introduced. The introduction of a timetable is seen to be of importance as this will help parents, guidance councillors, etc to come together and potential plan an individual pathway for a pupil or student who may be at-risk of becoming an ESL.

Strategic Action 16

The report recommends that the Ministry of Education and Employment and the relevant Directorates in the said Ministry should work with stakeholders in order to identify Vocational Education Training areas that should be targeted and design a timetable for when they will be introduced. The introduction of a timetable for their introduction will help parents, guidance councillors, etc to come together and potential plan an individual pathway for pupils or students who may be at-risk of becoming an Early School Leavers.

As stated above, the effort and resources required to develop VET curricula and programmes of study should not be underestimated. The report is of the considered opinion that the forthcoming EU multi-financing 2014-2020 is an opportunity for MEDE and the relevant Directorates within the said Ministry to present a case to the national and EU authorities of placing financing for design and implementation of a robust VET framework and programme of studies as a counter measure directed to reduce ESL and for Malta to meet the EU 2020 Strategy target on ESL.

The report recommends that the Ministry of Education and Employment and the relevant Directorates in the said Ministry should work with stakeholders in order to identify Vocational Education Training areas that should present a case to the national and EU authorities of placing financing for design and implementation of a robust Vocational Education Training framework and programme of studies as a counter measure directed to reduce Early School Leavers and for Malta to meet the EU 2020 Strategy target on Early School Leavers.

The new NCF is designed to respond to the development of the education system in Malta mainly – (i) the setting up in 2007 of the Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, where the level descriptors at levels 1 to 3 indicate the desired level of knowledge, skills and competences that every young person needs to achieve in order to move into lifelong learning or employment or both;(ii) the 2009 Referencing Report of the MQF to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) which gives a detailed account of how the level-descriptors of the first three levels of the MQF build the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to enable young people to move up the ladder of the qualifications framework; and (iii) the new National Learning Outcomes Framework that is recommended in the said NCF.

The linking of the three frameworks will ensure that at the end of the compulsory education cycle, students will be provided with the Secondary School Certificate and Profile which records their formal, informal and non-formal learning that would have taken place during the five year Secondary school Cycle. This certificate will be pegged at Levels 2 and 1 of the MQF and will be awarded subject to the achievement of the criteria indicated.[143]

The importance of this development in the NCF is that it provides a certification mechanism for the potential re-engagement of students who would have left school early but who with support mechanisms may be engaged to re-enter the education system and improve on his or her education.

The report supports the development in the National Curriculum Framework that students who finish the compulsory education cycle will be provided with the Secondary School Certificate and Profile, pegged at levels 2 and 1 of the Malta Qualifications Framework, which records their formal, informal and non-formal learning that would have taken place as this provides a mechanism for the potential re-engagement of students who would have left school early but who with support mechanisms may be engaged to re-enter the education system and improve on his or her education.

It is pertinent to underline that the new NCF seeks to reposition the curriculum from one which is 'content' intensive to one which is student centred and inquiry based. As discussed earlier, such a curricular approach is likely to reduce the number of ESL given that the process of education becomes more engaging through the use and application of a new pedagogy. For this new pedagogy to be attained there are two fundamental prerequisites that need to be attained.

The first, is that of introducing a new mind set amongst existing as well as new teachers that will allow them to embrace the new pedagogical approach. The challenges that need to be addressed to achieve such a new mind set cannot be under estimated. It will, on the one part, require a mammoth process directed to strengthen, up-skill, re-skill and re-tool existing teachers and educators. On the other hand, a review of how training colleges and institutions prepare and develop new teachers needs to be carried out followed by changes in the educational curriculum and the way students are lectured and prepared. With regard to the former, the report understands that the MEDE has, under the current financing period, presented an ESF application for the development of a Teacher Training Centre which would allow for the launch of a systematic up-skilling, re-skilling and re-tooling existing teachers and educators in order to be able to adopt the pedagogy espoused by the new NCF.

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143 Ibid

> **Strategic Action 19**
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> The report is of the considered opinion that the new student centred and inquiry based pedagogy espoused by the new National Curriculum Framework should reduce Early School Leavers yet for this pedagogy to be adopted by the school leaders and teaching community a systematic process of up-skilling, re-skilling and re-tooling is required. The project directed to develop a Teacher Training Centre is considered to be a positive step in this regard.

The second is the provision of the necessary tools that will allow the new pedagogy to be delivered. In this regard considerable worked has been carried out in State colleges and schools – and more recently the Government has made a commitment to support Church and Independent schools – with the implementation of an e-Learning framework, complemented by a tender which is currently under adjudication, for e-Content.

The MEDE and the DQSE is following up these initiatives with the development of a new e-Learning Centre that will (i) be utilised to create the tools necessary to leverage the investment the Maltese Government is making in e-Learning within its schools; customise off the shelf procured e-Content for Malta's education system; create new e-Content for subjects for which such content is not readily available on line such as Maltese; and maintain the e-Content current over time; and (ii) educate school leaders and teachers to ensure that they are fully conversant with this enabling technology and in doing so integrate the e-Learning content as seamlessly as possible into the classroom teaching of the diverse subjects.

The report is of the considered opinion that the use and application of e-Learning based on interactive e-Content will render learning more enjoyable and therefore help to reduce the number of early school leavers.

> **Strategic Action 20**
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> The report is of the considered opinion that the use and application of e-Learning based on interactive e-Content will render learning more enjoyable and therefore help to reduce the number of early school leavers. The project directed to develop an e-Learning Centre is considered to be a positive step in this regard.

03.5   Intervention Measures to Address Early School Leaving

The understanding garnered during the drafting of this report is that intervention projects at a school level directed to address students who are at risk of under achieving or who may be or, for the matter, may have a greater incidence of becoming at risk of dropping out of school, irrespective of whether the pupil is in the pre-primary, primary or secondary Cycles of State education is ad hoc and very much dependent on the leadership of the particular college or school.

Review of intervention measures in Europe and other jurisdictions such as USA and Australia shows that intervention measures are most effective when carried out directly with the student within the school environment or community – as against being removed from the mainstream education structure and placed within specialised environments.

And as stated earlier in this Chapter, the undertaking of school specific intervention measures should not only be multi-disciplinary in approach but also multi-stakeholder – bringing together parents, families, the community, teachers, the school, as well as the professional support workers. Research also shows that school specific intervention approaches result in benefits that apply not only to a child's emotional or behaviour difficulties but also to other outcomes such as improvements in family literacy and the breaking of intergenerational drug usage patterns.[144]

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144 Includes Clondalkin Partnership (2006). Incredible Years Basic Parenting Programme: The Clondalkin Partnership study in Ireland. Dublin; Edwards, R.T., Céilleachair, A., Bywater, T., Hughes, D.A., & Hutchings, J. (2007). Parenting programme for parents of children at risk of developing conduct disorder: Cost-effective analysis British Medical Journal; McGilloway, S., Bywater, T., Ní Mháille, G., Furlong, M., O'Neill, D., Comiskey, C., Leckey, Y., Kelly, P., & Donnelly, M. (2009). Incredible Years Ireland study: Proving the power of positive parent – summary report of research findings. Dublin

This report underlines that current approach to intervention measures should be replaced by a far more structured approach.

Thus, the report recommends that the proposed ESLMU should work with colleges in the State education sector as well as with the Church and Independent sectors to develop school comprehensive structured programmes target based on best practice that target different cohorts of children and students in pre and during compulsory education.

The following presents examples of specific intervention measures that are already introduced in Malta or could be considered for design and introduction.

(a)   Early Prevention Intervention Programmes for Early Years and Primary School Children

The adoption of early prevention intervention programmes that seek to imbue pro-social skills through the establishment of positive relationships with parents, and teachers, as well as the development of a positive interest in school constitutes a model whose effectiveness is strongly backed up by research demonstrating significant short-term and long-term benefits, as well as being cost-effective. These benefits apply not only to children's emotional/behavioural difficulties but also to other outcomes such as improvements in family literacy and the breaking of intergenerational drug usage patterns.[145]

The longitudinal research on the poor prognosis for "early starter" aggressive children suggest that early intervention is crucial. There is evidence that the earlier the intervention is offered, the more positive the child's behavioural adjustment at home and at school and the greater chance of preventing later delinquency. Developmental research also indicates that these children can be identified at school entry by the occurrence of aggressive problems across the home and school settings and that violent adolescents could be identified with almost 50% reliability as early as age six and even younger.

A successful programme, for example, is the Incredible Years[146] (IY) programmes for children, parents, and teachers. The IY was developed in the USA some 30 years ago and its effectiveness is strongly backed by research.[147] The IY model is directed to be skills and competencies oriented for children under 8 years of age such as:

• Child: strengthening his or her social skills, boost academic success, reading and school preparation, increase self-esteem.

• Parent: increase positive and nurturing parenting, increase family support networks and school involvement, help parents and teachers to work together.

• Increase teachers' use collaborative efforts with parents and promotion of parents' school involvement; strengthen proactive teaching approaches, etc.

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should review comprehensive structured programmes currently in place for Early Years and Junior school students which are directed at bringing the school, the parents and the teachers to promote social, emotional and academic competence and to prevent children and youths from developing conduct problems that would later increase the incidence of their dropping out of school. The purpose of the review would be to ensure that current interventions are effective in targeting and addressing children most at risk of educational under achievement and leaving school without qualifications, and address their academic, social, emotional and behavioural needs.

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145 Staying in Education: A New Way Forward, School and Out-of School Factors Protecting Against, Early School Leaving, First Report, Joint Committee on Education and Skills, House of the Oireachtas May 2010
146 www.incredibleyears.com
147 Staying in Education: A New Way Forward, School and Out-of School Factors Protecting Against, Early School Leaving, First Report, Joint Committee on Education and Skills, House of the Oireachtas May 2010

(b)   Creative Construction Programmes for Primary School Children

As discussed earlier in this Chapter, the new NCF seeks to introduce a VET pathway for senior secondary students to provide them with an alternative pathway to the traditional 'academic' curricular approach by means of introducing a balanced curriculum that incorporates a VET pathway directed to cater for students' different interests, learning styles and inclinations.

Research, however, shows that the introduction of a 'hands on' education component in the primary Cycle of education as an alternative approach to assist and facilitate disengaged and 'at risk' Primary school students between years 7 to 10 to re-engage them with formal schooling is a successful prevention measured with regard to ESL.[148]

In Australia, the Hands On Learning (HOL) – and validated by the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe - was introduced as an in-school early intervention program run one day a week for students at risk of disengagement from school. HOL provides alternative approaches to education, engaging students in creative construction projects. Over its 10 years of operation the programme has been successful in achieving the following key outcomes to date:

• Real retention rates for HOL students have been above 95% each year for the 10 years to 2009.

• Real retention rates in schools which use the HOL method have been approximately 10% higher than the State average for the 10 years to 2009. Both this point and the previous one directly support the objective of 90% Year 12 or equivalent attainment for students across the country by 2015.

• Unemployment rates amongst former HOL students averaged 2.2% in 2006, compared to 10.8% for Australians aged 15-24 in the same period.

• In 2011, more than an 80 per cent reduction in school detentions was reported amongst HOL students who joined the program in 2010.

(c)   Meeting the Needs of Disabled Persons

As discussed in Chapter 02, Malta has developed a comprehensive and deep rooted framework directed to assist children and youths with disabilities to follow compulsory education. Whilst disabled people are accessing better

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148 The Socio Economic Benefits of Investing in the Prevention of Early School Leaving, Deloitte, September 2012 http://handsonlearning.org.au/DAE_investing_in_preventing_ESL_via_HOL_ September_2012.pdf

quality education, they still tend to have a lower educational level, less qualification and a lower literacy level than the rest of the population. The state of play is as, at 2010, as follows[149]:

- Number of disabled people who were attending post-secondary and university levels totalled 128 students, which constituted just 0.9% of the general population of students at these levels

- Disabled people attending specialised vocational training provided by the Eden Foundation (now the Inspire Foundation), an NGO which provides services to people with intellectual impairments, and the Richmond Foundation (another NGO providing services to mental health system users aged between 20 and 40 years of age) totalled 18 people with 16 males and 2 females.

- The average illiteracy rate of disabled persons is 23.5% - a high rate when compared to the rate of 6% in the non-disabled population.

One of the key issues that impacts the progression of persons with disability in participating in further education and vocational training is the fact that the inclusive education support system targets only disabled students in compulsory education.

Thus, although support agencies as well as higher and further education institutions provide support such as:

- Personal assistant services, according to individual need, to disabled people wherever required provided by Agenzija Support;

- Braille, special examination arrangements, motorised wheelchairs or speech synthesisers provided by the ACCESS Disability Support Unit within the University of Malta;

- Restructuring of college areas previously inaccessible and the employment of trained support staff to work with disabled students by MCAST;

- Public buses that allow for wheel chair access are now in operation

the number of disabled students when compared to abled bodied students is still low

MEDE, KNPD, and education institutions should come together to design intervention measures that may include:

(i) Fostering early tracking beyond compulsory education.

(ii) Lowering access to empowering VET and applied training programmes – that could be hybrid with formal education and / or training.

(iii) Strengthening the transition framework between on scholastic year and the other.

(iv) Carrying out assessments of current policy frameworks, determine weaknesses and strengthen as appropriate.

(v) Introducing certification that is individualised and reflective of erratic pathways that many disabled students unlikely to experience due to their condition.

Strategic Action 23

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit works with the Kunsill Nazzjonali ghall Persuni B'Dizabilta, Agenzija Support and other stakeholders to review current support programmes across compulsory education as well as higher and tertiary education with a view to increase the percentage of disabled persons who obtain accreditation and certification. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Prevention Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to meeting the needs of disabled persons.

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149   ANED country report on equality of educational and training opportunities for young disabled people, Malta, http://www.disability-europe.net/content/aned/media/Report%20on%20equality%20of%20educational%20and%20training%20opportunities%20for%20young%20disabled%20people%20-%20Malta.pdf

(c)   Meeting the Needs of High Achievers

The learning needs of gifted students may differ dramatically from those of other students. Many gifted students benefit from faster paced learning, independent study, more complex content, and opportunities to use high order thinking and problem-solving skills.

At present there is no systematic approach to gifted education in Malta. Provision for gifted students is ad hoc, predominately provided on a school-by-school basis. Many schools make no, or minimal, provisions, or only implement provisions after extensive parent advocacy. There also is no evidence of specialised gifted programmes within the three sectors of education.

Under-achievement may also be an issue among gifted students who are performing well at school, with teachers sometimes failing to recognise that these students have the capacity to complete work at much higher levels than the work they are assigned at school.[150] Gifted students may require a different approach to learning, which includes:

•   Faster pace (including minimal repetition).

•   Independent, self-paced study.

•   Complex, challenging and open-ended tasks that use high order thinking and problem-solving skills.

•   Meaningful tasks with practical application.

•   Depth of content.[151]

Research suggests that unless gifted students are provided with the right environment to develop experiences of boredom, frustration, social isolation and bullying can have a range of adverse impacts on gifted students, including underachievement, behavioural issues and mental health problems – which results in their disengaging from the school environment and drop out of school.[152]

While there is no data on the number of gifted students in Malta, research overseas suggests that somewhere between 10% and 50% of all gifted school students fail to perform at the levels of which they are capable.[153] A significant number of gifted students leave school before completing the final year of compulsory education. Again there is no data on how many gifted students drop out of secondary education, though studies tend to range this between 10% to 40%.[154]

It is pertinent to underline that the MEDE has submitted an application for ERDF financing for a multi-complex environment directed to introduce the necessary support structures for the implementation of the NCF which will include the development of a High Achievers Learning Zone (HALZ)

150 Sally Reis and Betsy McCoach, 'The under achievement of gifted students: What do we know and where do we go?' 44(3) Gifted Child Quarterly 152

151 Inquiry into the education of gifted and talented students, Education and Training Committee, Parliamentary Paper, No 108, Session 2010-2012, Victoria, Australia, http://www.parliament.vic.gov.au/images/stories/committees/etc/Past_Inquiries/EGTS_Inquiry/Final_Report/Gifted_and_Talented_Final_Report.pdf

152 Ibid

153 Lee Wills and John Munro, 'Changing the teaching for the underachieving able child: The Ruyton School experience' in Diane Montgomery (ed) Able underachievers (2000) Whurr Publishers; Jeffrey Hoffman, Frances Wasson and Betsy Christianson, 'Personal development for the gifted underachiever' 8(3) Gifted Child Today 12, 12; Ken Seeley, 'Gifted students at risk' in Linda Kreger Silverman (ed) Counseling the gifted and talented (1993) Love Publishing Company; Wilma Vialle and Karen Rogers, 'Gifted, talented or educationally disadvantaged?' in Chris Forlin (ed) Future directions for inclusive teacher education: An international perspective (2012) Routledge, included in Submission 28.

154 Senate Employment, Workplace Relations, Small Business and Education References Committee, The education of gifted children (2001) Commonwealth of Australia, 14. See also Joseph Renzulli and Sunghee Park, 'Gifted dropouts: The who and the why' 44(4) Gifted Child Quarterly 261,

The setting up of the HALZ is directed to provide high achievers with an environment that will allow them to improve their skills, over and above what they are learning in a classroom environment, thus helping them to go beyond the normal curriculum in a way to allow them to remain engaged within the education system. Given the absence of data in this regard, the initial assumption is that the number of pupils who are expected to qualify for this facility will at the first instance be low and given the fact that the strengths of a gifted child may vary from child to child it is expected that, rather than traditional classroom training, the HALZ will provide mentoring for these gifted students.

Other intervention measures may include:

01. Within the proposed ESLMU establish a High Achievers Section that will have clear responsibility for coordinating policy and research, working with the appropriate authorities to establish protocols for the collation of data and working with the DQSE with regard to the development of new approaches to cater for high achieving students.

02. Provide information and support for teachers and schools about strategies for educating gifted students, including:

- Individual learning plans.

- Curriculum differentiation.

- Acceleration, particularly year level acceleration.

- Ability grouping, including vertical timetabling.

- Enrichment and enhancement.

03. MEDE in consultation with students, parents, schools, teachers, community, business and industry, establish a mentoring program for gifted students that include opportunities for virtual mentoring.

Strategic Action 24

The report supports the planning currently underway to create a High Achievers Learners Zone. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Meeting the Needs of High Achievers.

(d)   Meeting the Needs of Students from Minority Groups

School leaders and teachers across the three Sectors of education emphasise that there is an increasingly large number of children from migrant populations and that unless these children, and their parents, are supported with pro-active measures that allow them to integrate as quickly as possible than this children or youths will be at risk of disengaging from the education system.

It is pertinent to underline, that the new NCF presents 'diversity' as one of the core principles of education as principles of education as well as a cross curricular theme.

Be that as it may, intervention measures that may be considered include:

01. The need to develop guidelines for school plans on how best to integrate minority groups, devise appropriate teaching plans and introduce inter-cultural texts that reflect a range of cultures and perspectives.

02. Providing these students and their families with the necessary support that will allow them, as a minimum, to acquire the ability to write and speak in Maltese in the shortest time possible - which facility could be extended to incorporate English as well.

03. Providing support that is not limited only to language but also to cultural issues with regard to how the education system will impact children and the expectations from the labour market.

04. Given that the emerging heterogeneous classroom is a new 'phenomena' for Maltese teachers and that their professional training has not prepared them to handle a classroom with children from different countries with different cultures and religionsit was underlined that the teaching community should be provided with the appropriate skills that will allow them to handle a multi-cultural classroom.

05. The development of Initial Teacher education at the Faculty of Education within the University of Malta, in-house for training as well as support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity

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Strategic Action 25

The report supports the measures introduced in the new National Curriculum Framework with regard to establishing diversity as both a principle of education as well as a cross curricular theme. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Meeting the Needs of Students from Minority Groups.

(e)   Transition Programmes from Primary to Secondary Schools

The majority of children transfer successfully from primary to the secondary Cycle of education. As shown in Chapter 2, however, attendance rates in Malta tend to decline during the secondary Cycle of education. This tends to imply that support needs to be introduced to pre, during, and post transition to students in order to facilitate their integration within a secondary school – which invariably would be new, larger, etc. Research in Ireland has shown that some children find it hard to adjust to their new setting and that there is a significant difference between last year of primary and first year of secondary in perceptions of being treated fairly in school, and in willingness to ask a teacher a question.[155]

Support, therefore, is needed as the child makes the transition as otherwise there is the possibility that he or she might drop out particular where the primary and secondary schools are not joined up and there is no effective transition of information of the child from the primary school to the new secondary school and the new teachers who will be responsible for the child during the first year of secondary school.

Intervention mechanisms that can be considered to minimise the risk of a child becoming disengaged from the education system as he or she finds it difficult to make the transition for a primary school environment to a secondary one include:

01. A focusing of schools' institutional make-up so that their culture and ethos become much more student-friendly.

02. The setting up an electronic student information system that captures the child's development over the primary Cycle of education, teachers' reports, etc and which would be accessible to education leaders in the new secondary school and to the teachers who will be teaching the child.

03. Structured programmes which allows for interaction prior to the start of the school between education leaders and teachers responsible for the child during primary school and leaders and teachers of the new secondary school to which the child will be assigned to allow for proper understanding of the attributes of the child which would allow for the education professionals in the new school to prepare as appropriately as possible to integrate the child in the new environment.

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155 Downes, P., (2010), 'It's the heart, stupid'. Emerging Priority Issues for Prevention of Early School Leaving: A Solution-Focused Approach.

04.   The introduction of a mentoring or 'buddying' system, where older students are assigned a responsibility role to support newcomers during their first year in the secondary Cycle of education.

05.   Setting up of a welcome week for new students where parents and the child meet with the school leaders, teachers, mingle with new students, and become familiar with the school's resources, facilities, protocols and support systems within a relaxed environment.

Strategic Action 26

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should work with college networks and other support services within the Ministry of Education and Employment to the transition programmes in place today directed to enable students to adjust as they move from one Cycle of education to the other. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Prevention Unit should assess the 5 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Transition Programmes from Primary to Secondary Schools.

(f)   Mentoring

A key feature of several effective prevention programmes reported overseas is mentoring. Pro-social bonds may also be developed through mentoring which is a more selective intervention. In most programs this involves key personnel working directly with students, usually in a one-to-one situation. While this role may be undertaken by a teacher, programs now often involve other community members including business and community volunteers.

The creation of a connection with an adult mentor can reduce problem behaviour among at risk primary and lower-secondary students[156] Indeed mentoring is just as important in upper secondary as in lower secondary. An example of a successful mentoring measure is Talent Search.[157]

It is stated, that creating a connection with an adult through outside school mentoring is important. One such programme is the Big Brother Big Sister Program. Furthermore, research suggests that as little as twenty to thirty minutes of supportive conversation with an adult can make a difference to the decision of dropping out.[158] In this regard, research indicates that in upper secondary, mentoring and tutoring should be provided to those remaining few students in need of additional support where-in a strong one-to-one positive relationship with a teacher may seems to lower the rates of ESL.[159]

In the carrying of this report it was not clear to what extent mentoring is applied as intervention measure particularly with regard to students in the upper level of the Secondary cycle of education. The report recommends that the proposed ESLMU should carry out a study across the State, Church and Independent school sectors to assess the type of mentoring schemes in place, identify best practice examples, and design and promulgate policies and handbooks for the introduction of such mentoring schemes at a college and / or school level.

Strategic Action 27

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should carry out a study across the State, Church and Independent school sectors to assess the type of mentoring schemes in place, identify best practice examples, and design and promulgate policies and handbooks for the introduction of such mentoring schemes at a college and / or school level.

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156 Bradshaw, C., L. O'Brennan and C. McNeely (2008), "Core competencies and the Prevention of School Failure and Early School Leaving", in N.G. Guerra and C.P. Bradshaw (eds.), Core competencies to prevent problem behaviours and promote positive youth development. New Directions for Child and Adolescent Development, 122

157 Lyche, S., C., Taking on the Completion Challenge: A Literature Review on Policies to Prevent Dropout and Early School Leaving, OECD Education Working Papers, No 53, OECD Publishing, 2010, http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5km4m2t59cmr-en

158 Ibid

159 Ibid

(g)   Career Orientation and Guidance

One of the primary reasons for someone to drop out of education is the wrong choice of programme. Students find it difficult to make the right choice, or they do not have a clear idea of what the occupation involves or how the job market is. Career Orientation and Guidance covers a wide range of activities intended to guide young people into the appropriate programme or occupation.

As stated in the previous Chapter, MEDE working together with ETC and other institutions have introduced a number of initiatives directed to provide students with understanding of career options, on site work experiences during holidays, etc. It is pertinent to underline that guidance councillors are assigned with each college network.

Too often, however, career orientation and guidance sessions start late and often following a student's progression to the upper secondary years. This means that the defining 'career' decisions would have been taken for him or her as a student selects his or her academic pathway at the end of Form II (Year 8).

The following intervention measures are presented:

01.   The ESLMU works with colleges and schools to establish a framework that brings them closer to the private sector, public service, NGOs, training organisations, the industry, schools, further and higher educational institutions, ETC, Malta Enterprise, social welfare agencies etc so directed to facilitate the holding of orientation sessions, fairs, work place assignment, etc.

02.   Career orientation and guidance start from an early stage at secondary Cycle of education.

03.   Career orientation and planning is also integrated with the Personal and Social Development (PSD) lessons in schools.

04.   Colleges and schools organise a series of exploration visits in places of work to familiarise students with the working life through an applied learning environment.

Strategic Action 28

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should work with college networks and Guidance and Counselling Officers there in to initiate career orientation and guidance programmes from Form I (Year 7) of the Secondary cycle of education so that students are better informed with regard to the subject choices they will be asked to make at the end of Form II (Year 8).

(h)   Community Partnerships with Local Schools

The development of programmes that seek to encourage ESL policy designed at a local level is not limited to children in the Early and Primary Cycles of education respectively. In the Netherlands, the *Aanval op schooluitval* framework brings together schools and municipalities to develop their own programmes to tackle the problem in their locality.

This framework is based on the rationale that programmes to tackle ESL should be developed at a local level because schools and municipalities have a better understanding of the situation in their area and can target particular problem schools. Within the context of the education system within the Netherlands, the policy framework provides funding to local partners. Local partners then allocate these funds to different secondary schools on the basis of school performance in relation to rates of ESL, truancy, etc. In addition to this funding the framework also provides financial incentives to schools which perform well and reduce the number of pupils who drop out.[160] The key programmes components include[161]:

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160 Ministry of Education, Culture and Science, the Netherlands (2010), The approach to school drop-out: Policy in the Netherlands and the provisional figures of the 2008-2009 performance agreements
161 Ibid

- Extension of compulsory education and training obligation to 18 years of age.

- Better student registration and monitoring.

- Municipal agreements or 'covenants' with schools to reduce school drop-out. Schools are free to choose their own method of reducing the number of drop-outs but partnership working, career guidance and one-to-one support are the most frequently used methods. Other activities include mentoring schemes, working life familiarisation projects and skills portfolios.

- Reinforced guidance and counselling, including support in transition points.

In the carrying of this report it was not clear to what community based partnerships between colleges and schools and the local community. The report recommends that the proposed ESLMU should carry out a study across the State, Church and Independent school sectors to assess the type of community partnerships schemes in place, identify best practice examples, and design and promulgate policies and handbooks for the introduction of such community partnership schemes at a college and / or school level.

Strategic Action 29

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit should carry out a study across the State, Church and Independent school sectors to assess the type of community partnership schemes in place, identify best practice examples, and design and promulgate policies and handbooks for the introduction of such community partnership schemes at a college and / or school level.

(i)   Relay Schemes

'Relay schemes' are transition measures aimed at pupils under the age of 16 secondary level pupils at risk of marginalisation and who are in a situation of acute conflict with their school and the schemes aim to re-socialise and re-motivate pupils, who spend a few weeks in a sheltered, conflict-free learning environment before they are reintegrated into their school of origin. They offer an individualised service to participants (covering both educational and social support) and help pupils to acquire a basic level of skills and competences, improve motivation and develop a better relationship with educational institutions, with a view to continuing their education and training pathway.[162]

In France, for example, there are two forms of relay scheme: relay classes (*classes relais*) and relay workshops (*ateliers relais*) with relay classes lasting to a maximum duration of 16 weeks and are run in partnership between the Ministry of Education, local/municipal authorities and other recognised partners such as educational NGOs.[163]

As discussed in Chapter 2, Malta has introduced such schemes through the Learning Support Zones and Nurture Groups – where 4 such centres are in operation with one other planned to be introduced with the Mtarfa Education Complex.

The report recommends that the proposed ESLMU should carry out a comprehensive review with regard to the performance of the Learning Support Zones and Nurture Groups 1 order to assess how they are positively affecting the social, emotional and academic competence of as well as enabling children to re-integrate successfully in mainstream education.

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162 Neval, A., M., Hawley, J., et al Reducing Early School Leaving in the EU – A Study, Produced for the Directorate General for Internal Policies, Policy Department B: Structural and Cohesion Policies, Education and Culture by GHK Consulting Ltd
163 Ibid

03.6   Compensation Measures to Address Early School Leaving

The notion of 'second chance' is strongly supported by recent theories of transition in the field of youth studies research. The traditional, linear, uni-dimensional models based on age or school to work transition are considered inadequate as they fail to capture the complexities of youth transitions in the post-modern era. This linear thinking that pervades is based on the assumption that a youth's transition is solely the school-to-work passage preferably through higher and further education. This focus ignores other transitions such as family, household or life style transitions and does not appear to include the equally important reversible movement of re-entry into education.[164]

Recent views of youth transitions as multidimensional, circular processes are gaining prominence: where-in they include other kinds of transition such as moving away from home, movement from one relationship to the next, changes in life styles and transitions from single to parental status. Transition, therefore, is perceived to be a fluid state, of always becoming, of arrival and departure, of leaving and re-entering education.[165]

In this context, rejection of first chance education does not always represent closure. For many non-completers re-entry into second chance education is linked with the notion of education as 'unfinished business'.[166] It acknowledges, therefore, that an ESL still has to complete a significant part of their education outside the school environment.[167] Providing such second chance options often, however, means that the process of completing one's education, an already lengthy process, is further prolonged.

Additionally, ESL would have acquired a range of skills and competences outside of formal education which are, potentially, transferable and potentially valuable on the labour market. This is particularly relevant for ESL who have gained significant experience through[168]:

•   Work experience (e.g. they may have dropped out of education to work in the family business or they have left to pursue their chosen career as early as possible, or they had to leave school early to support their own children, siblings or parents).

•   Responsibilities within the home (e.g. responsibility to look after own children, siblings or parents).

•   Participation in non-formal training courses (e.g. through work or adult education providers) or reintegration programmes for unemployed or vulnerable young people.

•   Hobbies or volunteering (e.g. gained organisational or coaching skills through their role in scouts, youth clubs or sport teams).

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164 Ross, R., and Gray J., Transitions and Re-engagement through Second Chance Education, Edith Cowan University, Australian Educational Researcher Volume 32, No 3, December 2005 http://www.aare.edu.au/aer/online/50030f.pdf

165 Wyn, J. & R. White (1997) Rethinking Youth, Allen & Unwin, Australia

166 Munns, G. & M. McFadden (2000) First chance, second chance or last chance? Resistance and response to education, British Journal of Sociology of Education, vol. 21, no. 1,

167 Wyn, J. & P. Dwyer (2000) New patterns of youth transition in education, International Social Science Journal, vol. 164

168 Ulicna, D., Nevala, A., Hawley, J., Recognition of prior learning and experiences as a means to re-integrate early school leavers into education and training, Background paper prepared for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2012, Youth and Skills: Putting Education to Work, GHK, 2012/ED/EFA/MRT/PI/36, 2012

Opportunities to recognise such skills and competences can help to increase the self-esteem, aspirations and employability of young school dropouts.

It is the view of the ILO that for early school leavers, second-chance initiatives have been effective in reaching out to those young people who are neither in employment nor education or training. Whilst there are a number of different 'second chance' intervention programmes most of these provide alternative training modalities where their delivery and curriculum are non-traditional and offered in informal or non-formal settings.[169] Indeed, in the way forward the ILO recommends that Governments should give serious consideration in improving mechanisms for ELS through "Supporting second-chance initiatives to facilitate the acquisition of basic knowledge and competencies both for those who leave school too early or never attended school and for the unemployed who want to resume their studies, with particular attention to young women and girls."[170]

Denmark has "production schools", publicly funded, to attract and train those youth uncertain about their career path as well as those who have dropped out of other forms of formal schooling. Production schools are not formal qualifying upper secondary education establishments.[171]

Norway has integrated apprenticeships into "new pathways" in Coop programmes involving small firms.[172] Finland has youth workshops. Australia, the Netherlands and the U.K. have programs set up on the principle of requiring young job seekers to further their education, while providing them with an allowance to do so.[173]

The Embedded Learning for Foundation Students initiative, discussed in the previous Chapter, recently introduced by MCAST in Malta is a positive 'second chance' education programme. The Embedded Learning programme will combine the development of literacy, language and numeracy with vocational and other skills targeted to provide learners with the confidence, competence and motivation necessary for them to succeed in the achievement of qualifications, in life and at work. The student target cohort is youths who after completing five years of compulsory secondary schooling obtained a school leaving certificate but no other formal qualifications.

The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) has also introduced 'second chance' programmes introduced in Malta – mainly the:

•   Key Competencies Certification provided under the Youth Programme. The programme is directed towards eight key competences, namely communication in Maltese (mother tongue), communication in English (official language), Mathematics, Science and Technology, Digital Literacy, Learning to Learn, Social and Civic Competences, Entrepreneurship and Cultural Expression. The programme is directed to imbue and development in persons who enrol with knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for them to achieve personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment, as well as lifelong learning.

•   Best Employment Training which provides basic skills training to persons who come out from mainstream education with low qualifications.

•   Continuation out programmes related to working with secondary schools to provide alternative solutions to students with high school absenteeism based on the previously referenced REACH programme.

169 The Youth Employment Crisis: A Call for Action, A Resolution and conclusions of the 101st Session of the International Labour Conference, Geneva, 2012, http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/@ed_norm/@relconf/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_185950.pdf

170 Ibid

171 Ross, Sharon and Jan Gray. 2005. "Transitions and re-engagement through second chance education." The Australian Educational Researcher 32

172   Lerman, Robert I. 2000. "Improving Career Outcomes for Youth: Lessons from the U.S. and OECD Experience. Research and Evaluation Monograph Series." U.S. Department of Labour. Accessed October 14, 2006 from http://wdr.doleta.gov/opr/fulltext/01-oecd.pdf

173 Dianne Looker, E., and Thiessen V., The Second Chance System: Results from the three cycles of the Youth in Transition Survey, Learning Research Series, Learning Policy Directorate, Strategic Policy and Research, April 2008

- Traineeships Programme. This programme is a dual system of occupational skill development that consists of a combination of on-the-job training and off-the-job training leading to certification on the basis of a competency test.[174]

- A potential introduction of a new scheme entitled 'Active' directed at job seekers which will constitute a nine-month training programme will be formulated as follows:

  - 1st Month: Job search seminar; meeting with the employment advisor; design of the personalised action plan.

  - Between 3rd and 6th month: new activation courses; job skills course.

  - Between 6th and 9th month: Work-placement in the area of preference.

  The programme will ensure that young job-seekers are trained on the acquisition of the employability skills needed to participate in the labour market, whilst being closely followed by a mentor. The seminars and courses which the participant will follow will be youth-centred and will be designed in accordance with the particular characteristics of the young person. At the end of this programme, the trainee will be provided with a recognised certificate that will group together both the formal and the on-the-job training.

Additionally, the Youth.Inc Programme managed by the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) provides a reintegration project by providing personalised support to youth who do not have formal qualifications. Through the adoption of a person-centred approach, an action plan is devised according to the needs of the individual. The notion behind Youth.Inc is to offer young people the opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills and work exposure through an environment which is not associated with the academic stream.

The DLL is also a leading provider in second-chance opportunities for learners. A number of young people who did not obtain the entry qualifications to pursue their studies at post-secondary and tertiary level are attending evening courses organised by the Directorate. In the last scholastic year a total of 441 and 773 individuals aged 15 to 20 years and 21 to 30 years respectively pursued an evening programme. In the scholastic year 2011/2012 a Lifelong Learning Centre in Msida was opened for young people who did not attain a SEC certificate. 49 young people aged between 16 and 24 (18 – male; 31 – female) joined the programme. Moreover, the Directorate for Lifelong Learning offers a number of programmes through the Visual and Performing Arts Schools which help young people to develop their creative talent in the field of arts.

Further to the initiatives currently underway or recently embarked upon the following are strategic actions that may be considered by MEDE working in conjunction with ETC and higher and further education institutions:

01. Undertaking a process of review to identify outcomes of the existing programmes and identify as appropriate measures to strengthen these programmes.

02. Establish outcomes and outputs for each of these programmes and institutionalise a process of on-going review.

03. Establishing a framework for certifying prior learning and render prior learning as a stimulus to engage early school leavers to an access of formal learning and further non-formal learning which may otherwise be inaccessible. This should include Core competencies which are acquired by the individual in the course of his/her employment should be credited

04. The enhancement of work-based learning so that the point of entry is set at an appropriate level to attract those with minimal or no qualifications.

05. Placement of non-formal and informal learning a universal right of Maltese citizens.

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174 http://etc.gov.mt/Category/3/6/Training-Trainees.aspx

06. Review the entry requirements of existing programmes to recognise prior learning and extend all programme to 24 years of age – the baseline relating to the definition of ESL.

07. Depart from a system of accreditation for second chance and re-integration programmes that is based on pass or fail by introduce a Passport based system similar to the ECDL that will demonstrate skills and competencies acquiring whilst allow flexibility that allows the individual to complete other modules as and when appropriate.

08. Introduce second chance and re-integration programmes on a modular and part-time basis to cater for those youths who wish to increase their level of education whilst continuing to be in employment.

Strategic Action 31

The report recommends that the proposed Early School Leaving Prevention Unit works with the Ministry of Education and Employment, the Employment and Training Corporation, the Malta Council for Science, Arts and Technology and other stakeholders to review 'second chance' and 're-integration' programmes to assure that they are meeting the objectives for which they have been set and that there is no unnecessarily overlap between the various programmes underway. It is further proposed that the Early School Leaving Prevention Unit should assess the 8 measures suggested in the main body of the report with regard to Compensation Measures.

03.7 Measuring the Success of the Early School Leaving Strategy

The NCF establishes the knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values that a learner is expected to have at the end of the Early Years Cycle (Y2); the end of the Junior Years Cycle (Y6) and at the end of the Secondary Years Cycle (Y11 (FV)) – which at a high level include:

Early Years Cycle	Junior Years Cycle	Secondary Years Cycle
Children who develop a strong sense of identity	Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners.	
Children who have a positive self-image		
Children who are socially adept	Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work	
Children who are effective communicators		
Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners	Learners who are engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities	

The NCF states that desired learning outcomes of the NCF will best be gauged at the end of the full compulsory Cycle of education of a learner who enters and completes an education system that is consistent with the NCF's Principles and Aims of education – which is seen to be scholastic year 2025/2026. The NCF underlines that if the education system over the three Cycles of education would have performed and delivered the learning outcomes as planned, then it would be reasonable to assume that the desired outcomes with regard to early school leavers would decrease to 10%.

The success of the recommendations proposed in this report should be gauged on the following outcomes and outputs:

Outcome	Outputs
Learning	Should be based on literacy and numeracy skills
	Learning Outcomes Framework
Engagement	Absenteeism
	Expulsion and Suspension rates
	Attitude towards school
	Commitment towards completing school
	Participation and involvement in learning
	Goals or aspirations for post school
	Identification and education development of high achievers
	Period within which migrate workers learn to speak and write in Maltese
	Referrals to Learrning Support Zones and other forms of support
	Risk factors
	Increasing participation in non-formal activities
Transitions	Successful transition to Junior school
	Grades at Y4 examination in State Schools
	Grades at Y6 benchmark
	Successful transition to Secondary School
	Successful transition to Higher and Further education
	Transition to 'Second Chance' and re-integration Programmes
	Apparent retention rates
	Real retention rates
	Post school destinations

The proposed Department of Research and Statistics within DQSE should work with the ESLMU in order to determine the data collection procedures so that the success is measured in a quantifiable manner. The data with regard to a number of these measures will overlap with research instruments that will be introduced to measure the success of the NCF. Others measures which are relatively less tangible would require the undertaking of focus groups and surveys with children, youths, parents, teachers, carers, etc.

Strategic Action 32

The report recommends the strategy is assessed on the basis of the following three outcomes:

(I)   Literacy.
(ii)   Engagement.
(iii)   Transition.

Each of these outcomes is supported by a number of outputs which are presented in the main body of the report.

The Early School Leaving Monitoring Unit will work with the proposed Department of Research and Statistics to identify and ensure the implementation of the necessary procedures for the collection of data for the measurement of each output from sources ranging from formal structured data collection to the holding of focus groups are introduced.

04
Post Script

Re-mapping of information relating to the rate of Early Leavers from Education and Training

Directorate C: Social Statistics

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Introductory note on ISCED

The International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) was designed by UNESCO in the early 1970s to serve 'as an instrument suitable for assembling, compiling and presenting statistics of education both within individual countries and internationally'. It was approved by the International Conference on Education, and was subsequently endorsed by UNESCO's General Conference when it adopted the Revised Recommendation concerning the International Standardisation of Educational Statistics.

Experience over the years with the application of ISCED by national authorities and international organisations, has shown the need for its updating and revision. This would further facilitate the international compilation and comparison of education statistics, and would take into account new developments and changes in education: (i) the multiplication and growth of different forms of vocational education and training, (ii) the increasing diversity of education providers, and (iii) the increasing recourse to distance education and other modalities based on new technologies.

The current classification, known as ISCED 1997, was approved by the UNESCO General Conference in 1997. It was the result of extensive consultations of worldwide representation and covers primarily two cross-classification variables: levels and fields of education. In 2011, however, a revision to ISCED was formally adopted following extensive international and regional consultations among education and statistical experts. ISCED 2011 takes into account significant changes in education systems worldwide since the last ISCED revision in 1997.

The first data collection based on the new classification will begin next year. The UNESCO Institute for Statistics worked closely with Member States and partner organisations (such as OECD and Eurostat) to map education systems to the new classification and to revise collection instruments. The new classification will lead to a more harmonised approach between EU Member States which will result in more comparability than that for ISCED 1997.

ISCED in Malta

In Malta, ISCED was introduced for the first time in the late 1990s. Prior to the setting up of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) in 2005, the mapping of national qualifications and courses to ISCED 1997 was made by the National Statistics Office in consultation with the Department of Education. The setting up of MQC, along with the accreditation of courses and the assignment of MQF levels, paved the way for a reassessment of the existing classification system. Concurrently, discussions on the new ISCED 2011 were taking place at European level.

In this regard, the NSO initiated discussions with MQC regarding the mapping of nationally available qualifications to the ISCED 2011 classification. This mapping took on board European Qualification Framework (EQF) criteria and matched them with those of the new ISCED. Through this exercise, the classification of ordinary level qualifications ('O' levels or their equivalents) were looked into since at a national level these were being considered as a secondary level qualification (ISCED 2). On the other hand, countries which had this qualification available at a national level were mapping it at ISCED 3.

Rate of Early Leavers from Education and Training

One indicator which emerges from Labour Force Survey data classified by ISCED is the rate of Early Leavers from Education and Training (ESL), which is defined as follows:

Persons between 18 and 24 years of age whose highest level of education or training is ISCED 0, 1, 2 or 3c short, and who are not in education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey as a percentage of the total population of those aged 18 to 24.

When computing ESL rates, persons between the ages of 18 and 24 who are no longer in education or training, but who had completed secondary education, were being classified as early school leavers, irrespective of the qualifications they had attained. The NSO noted that in a number of countries with similar educational systems, qualifications at upper secondary level (from Form 4 onwards) were also being used to measure the highest level of education of respondents, whereas in Malta this factor was not being taken into account. This matter was discussed with the European Commission (Eurostat) to seek guidance on the appropriate classification to ensure a harmonised measurement of educational attainment.

The NSO also became aware that, for example, the number of ordinary level or similar qualifications was being taken into account by the United Kingdom in order to determine the ISCED level of respondents who had completed upper secondary education. In the UK, persons who had obtained at least five Ordinary levels were being classified under ISCED level 3 whereas in Malta, prior to the re-mapping exercise, similar persons were categorised in ISCED level 2. As a result, when applying the ESL definition at a national level these persons were deemed to be early school leavers whereas in other EU Member States, such as the UK, they were not. This practice was already made possible from 2006 in the LFS, under Regulation No 430/2005 and is confirmed by ISCED 2011.

In view of these occurrences, in December, Eurostat agreed that in order for Malta to be more in line with what other countries were doing, if at a national level a person obtained at least five 'O' levels, s/he had to be classified at ISCED 3. Since this approach was bound to affect the ESL rate, the NSO initiated work so as to address this classification issue and to assess the impact of this change. The final outcome of this consultation resulted in a re-mapping exercise of MQF and ISCED, with the impact on ESL restricted to MQF levels 2 and 3.

Eurostat provided a number of instructions regarding the extent of the revisions to educational attainment data and consequently to ESL rates. In view of this, the following tasks were undertaken on the Labour Force Survey data by the NSO:

- Administrative data with results pertaining to SEC or equivalent exams, 'A' levels and Foundation Courses was obtained so as to have a clear picture of the number of passes that candidates had obtained.

- This information was matched with statistical information collected from the Labour Force Survey.

- Consequently NSO was in a position to produce revised estimates of the number of persons from the total population between 18 and 24 who were early school leavers using the new criteria (i.e. persons who were not in education or training and who had not obtained at least 5 'O' levels or equivalent).

The outcome of this exercise resulted in the following:

Period	ESL before re-mapping (%)	ESL after re-mapping (%)
January-March: 2010	36.2	24.3
April-June: 2010	38.3	25.5
July-September: 2010	37.4	24.6
October-December: 2010	35.7	25.1
January-December: 2010	**36.9**	**24.8**
January-March: 2011	34.5	23.8
April-June: 2011	32.7	22.3
July-September: 2011	34.3	24.4
October-December: 2011	32.3	23.9
January-December: 2011	**33.4**	**23.6**

The re-mapped ESL figures for these two years will be available on Eurostat's website next month.

In the coming weeks, NSO is planning additional work in connection with the ESL rates. This includes the revision of LFS data pertaining to 2000-2009, and to 2012. Such revisions result in the non-comparability of these new rates with currently available ones for the same years.

Further details will be made available upon written request to <u>*nso@gov.mt*</u>

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