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Principles and general objectives of education

While ensuring education and training in areas relevant to the needs of Maltese society, the education system affords the individual, without any distinction as to age, sex, belief or economic means, the opportunity to develop his/her full cognitive, affective and operative potential. Human resources form the basis of the economy of the country and their development through education has been the main aim of successive Maltese governments. The government provides a system of education that is open to all, aiming at providing free quality education at all levels from pre-primary to university and during adulthood. Education and culture should be accessible to all citizens to enhance their personal development, to create knowledgeable and responsible citizens, and qualified and flexible workers capable of changing career as and if necessary.

The document *Malta's National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy*, supports the Europe 2020 Strategy based on sustainable growth and jobs as well as the emphasis on employment, education, equality and the environment which together with health are the pillars of a society's welfare. Addressing labour productivity by focusing on education, investment, research and development, and improving market functioning, holds the key for Malta to address its competitiveness challenges. (MFEI, April 2011).

According to the National Minimum Curriculum of 1999, on completion of one's education in a Maltese school, one should: be capable of understanding oneself, the world around oneself and that which is deemed morally correct; be a democratic person and conscious of one's Maltese identity; understand the Catholic worldview (for those who embrace Catholicism); consider men and women as being equal and have a good understanding of human sexuality; be an informed consumer and media literate; be a worker and make good use of one's free time; care for one's health; think scientifically and technically; communicate; and welcome change.

In conformity with the principles outlined in the (draft) National Curriculum Framework of 2011, the aim of education is to prepare all children to become lifelong learners, confident, successful, creative, connected and engaged in the community and the world around them. Their education should enable them to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that make them capable of sustaining their life chances in the changing world of work, and to become actively engaged citizens. (MEEF, 2011–Document 2).

Laws and other basic regulations concerning education

The **Constitution** of the Republic of Malta and the **Education Act** of 1988 and subsequent amendments provide the legal framework of the education system. The 2006 amendment to the Education Act (**Act No. XIII** of 4 August 2006) 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. 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 decentralization 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 also provided for the creation of the National Commission for Higher Education and the re-establishment of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) with the mission to provide studies and training in the field of vocational and professional education. The Act has been last amended in 2010.

The **Employment and Training Services Act (Act No. XXVIII** of 1990 and subsequent amendments) provides the legal framework for a National Employment Authority, for the establishment of an Employment and Training Corporation and for the regulation of employment and training services. The Act gives the Employment and Training Corporation the power to regulate and oversee apprenticeships and describes its roles and responsibilities. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Act No. XVIII relating to the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications was enacted by Parliament in 2002. This Act established the structures for both academic and professional recognition as well as the means of appeal. The Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre was officially established with the publication of the Act of 2002 as the official body entrusted by the state to evaluate, provide advice, inform, promote, facilitate and enforce on matters regarding comparability of higher education, as well as professional and vocational qualifications.

The Education Act specifies 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. 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.

According to the Constitution, primary education shall be compulsory and free of charge in state schools. The Education Act provides for the right of every citizen to receive education and instruction without any distinction of age, sex, belief or economic means. It stipulates that compulsory education means any age from 5 years to 15 years, both inclusive, and accordingly a person shall be deemed to be of compulsory school age if he/she has attained the age of 5 years and has not attained the age of 16 years. Students attaining the age of 16 on or after 15 September (the start of the school year) are obliged to complete the school year, but are considered as exempt from attending school as from the following 16 July (that is, at the end of the school year in question). Students who attain the age of 16 after 15 July (end of the school year) but before 15 September (beginning of the next school year) are considered as exempt and need not attend school as from the following 15 September.

Administration and management of the education system

Education in Malta is currently the prime responsibility of the **Ministry of Education and Employment** (the Ministry's areas of responsibility changed several times during the last decade). The executive head is the Minister, assisted by the Permanent Secretary. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and the Directorate for Educational Services are centrally responsible for ensuring quality assurance and services from pre-primary up to the end of compulsory education. The two Directorates replaced the former Education Division in September 2007, separating its dual functions in the process. Each Directorate is headed by a Director General. (Eurydice, March 2010). Within the Ministry there are also four directorates under the direct responsibility of the Permanent Secretary: Corporate Services, Policy Development and Programme Implementation, European Union and International Affairs, and Lifelong Learning.

On the basis of Articles 8 and 9 of the 2006 amendment to the Education Act, the mission of the **Directorate of Quality and Standards in Education** is to regulate, establish, monitor and assure standards and quality in the programmes and educational services provided by schools. The function of the Directorate is to generally regulate, guide, evaluate, verify, research and report on the various elements and the results of the compulsory education system with the aim of assuring quality education for all and in order to promote good practices in all activities related to such education in a national curricular framework of lifelong learning. Among other functions and duties, the Directorate shall to propose to the Minister a National Curriculum Framework which promotes a lifelong learning policy and strategy. The Directorate comprises two departments, i.e. the **Department of Curriculum Management and e-Learning**, in charge of monitoring the teaching and learning process and provide support and advice to teachers and school management, and the **Department of Quality Assurance**, responsible for school external reviews and supporting school improvement.

Article 11 of the Education Act as amended in 2006 specifies that the general function of the **Directorate for Educational Services**, in constant collaboration with the Colleges (see below) and schools, to plan, provide and allocate the resources, human and otherwise, services, and learning tools, both of a pedagogical, psychosocial, managerial and operative nature and other ancillary support tools, as required in the State colleges, schools and educational institutions, and to encourage and facilitate their networking and cooperation. The Directorate comprises three Departments, namely Student Services, Human Resources Development, and School Resource Management. (Eurydice, October 2011). The Adult Learning Unit within the Directorate for Educational Services, is one of the leading providers of adult education.

The **Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board** was established in 1991 by the Senate and the Council of the University of Malta. The Board was entrusted with the development of an examination system to replace the General Certificate of Education (GCE) Ordinary and Advanced level examinations set by United Kingdom examination boards. The



new board also took over the function of the Matriculation Board which also used to set examinations at Ordinary and Advanced level in a number of subjects.

In accordance with the Education Act amended in 2006, the **National Commission for Higher Education** (set up in October 2006) shall: ascertain the needs and the aspirations of further and higher education; inform the public on issues connected with sustainable development of the further and higher education sectors in order to meet the needs of society; give advice to government on any matter which is connected with the further and higher education sectors; and recommend to the competent authority systems and policies for the evaluation, approval, accreditation, authorization and recognition of institutions and programmes that will ensure their quality, as well as keep a register of authorized and accredited institutions and programmes available in Malta. (Articles 64 to 66).

In October 2005, Parliament approved the establishment of the **Malta Qualifications Council** (MQC) through Legal Notice No. 347/2005 with the purpose of defining a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) aligned to the European Qualifications Framework (Malta entered the European Union in 2004). The NQF was developed and is maintained in the framework of lifelong learning, and focuses on learning outcomes defined in terms of knowledge, skills and competencies. Similar to the European Qualification Framework, the Maltese NQF is meant to be a common reference point between training providers, industry and learners. The NQF was completed and launched in June 2007 and since then it has been adjusted and evolved to accommodate and include more qualifications. It is based on eight levels.

It is expected that the National Commission for Higher Education and the MQC will be merged into one national agency for quality assurance, accreditation and licensing of all public and private further and higher education programmes and institutions. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

The **Employment and Training Corporation** provides training in vocational areas mainly to unemployed persons although its courses are open also to those who wish to further their education to improve their employment opportunities.

The amended Education Act of 2006 re-established the **Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology** (MCAST, first created in August 2000). The general purpose of the MCAST is to ensure the existence of educational institutions accessible to all, and to establish such facilities and such programmes of education and training (including distance learning), and of work and practical experience to provide all with the opportunity to qualify in trades, skills, artisan or technical or commercial activities, and in the professions according to the socio-economic needs of the country in a lifelong learning curriculum framework and holistic personal development. Among other functions, the MCAST shall develop curricula of study and training based on the concept of lifelong learning, leading to certificates based on the knowledge and competences demanded by the labour market. The MCAST shall organize instruction and training at the required levels, including the levels established by the MQC. The MCAST integrates ten institutes and two centres in Gozo. The **Institute of Tourism Studies** (ITS) and the **Institute of Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage** (ICMCH) also provide vocational education and training courses at the post-compulsory level.



Starting from October 2005, schools have been grouped into **College Networks**, and the phasing in of Colleges was completed in October 2007. Ten Colleges have been set up, nine covering Malta and the tenth Gozo. Each College is a corporate body having legal personality, is under the responsibility, guidance and administration of a **College Principal**, and is composed of a number of kindergartens-primary schools and at least two secondary schools. There is also a network of four special schools. (Eurydice, March 2010). On the basis of Article 50 of the Education Act, each College is a body corporate having a legal and distinct personality and which may, subject to the provisions of the Act, enter contracts, acquire, hold and dispose of any kind of property for the purposes of its functions, or to sue or to be sued, and to perform all such matters and such operations which are incidental or conducive to the exercise or the execution of its functions. Among other functions, each College shall ensure: that students entrusted to the schools within the College receive their educational entitlement according to their potential in a full, continuous and smooth process of education from an early age to the end of compulsory education in the perspective of lifelong learning and inspired by the highest human values; and that the National Curriculum Framework is translated into an appropriate curriculum for College students and that this is implemented in all its schools with the best methodologies, including an extensive use of the information and communication technology as a pedagogical tool. Colleges shall also ensure a professional development process for teachers and monitor the operation, administration and general conduct of the schools.

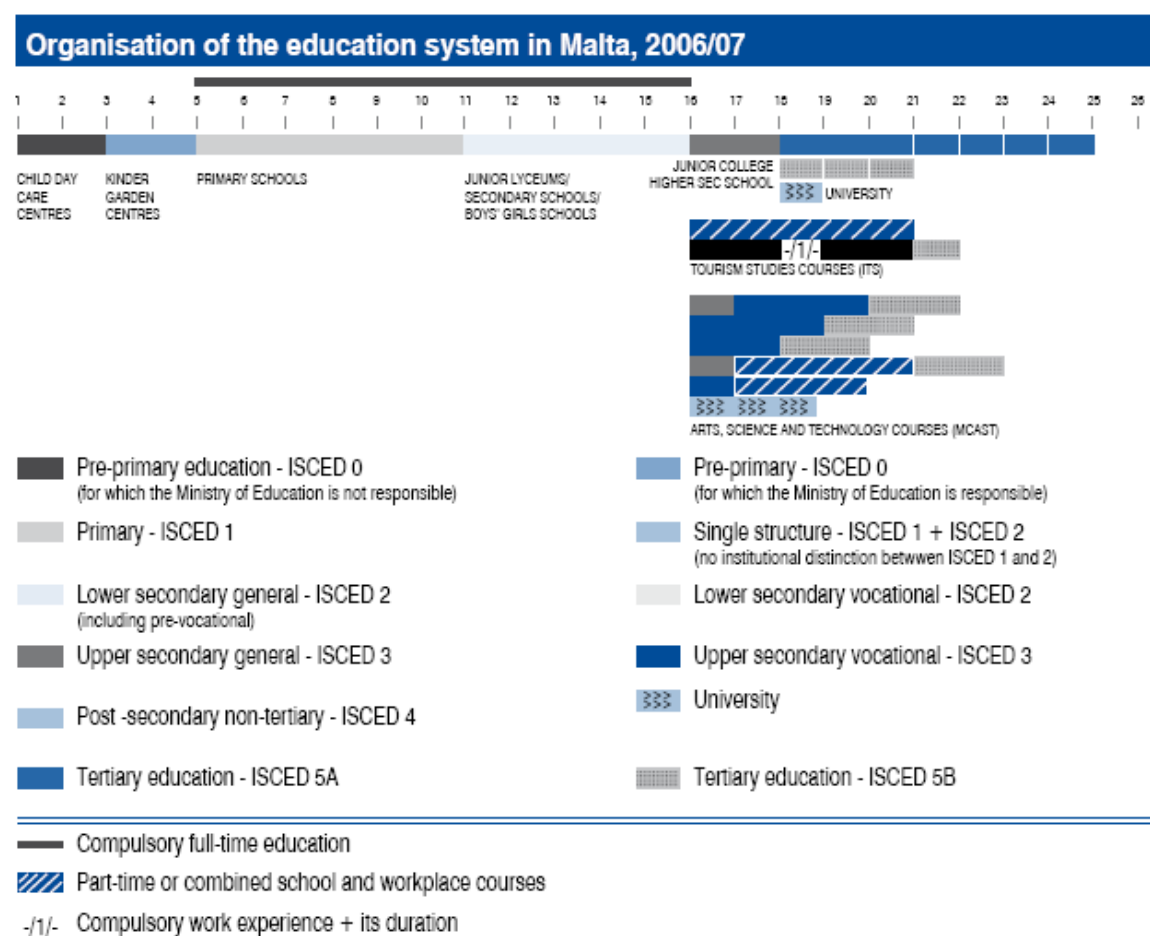
Local Councils are expected to cater for the protection of school children in the vicinity of schools. In principle they are to provide, in conjunction with any competent authority, for the maintenance and upkeep of crèches, kindergartens and other educational services or buildings. There are 68 local councils, 54 in Malta and 14 in the island Gozo. There is a Minister who is responsible for Gozo affairs and has some influence on the running of schools in the island.

State schools are administered directly by the heads of school and their assistants. Each school has a **School Council** which is composed of: a president appointed by the Minister in consultation with the local council; the head of school who acts as the secretary and treasurer; three members elected by and from among the teaching staff of the school; and three other members elected by the parents of the students under 16 as well as by the students over 16. In the case of schools in the post-secondary level, in addition to the members mentioned above, three other members representing the general interest in a field of study are appointed by the Minister.

The School Council administers the funds and assets of the school. The school administration is empowered to take a number of administrative decisions previously the remit of the central administration. Limited funds are made available to schools to purchase equipment and materials, organize activities and carry out minor maintenance and repair works. Primary and secondary schools have to formulate a three-year business plan and a school development plan. School staff takes part in the performance management programme. The Junior College, a leading institution offering general education at upper secondary level, is attached to the University of Malta since 1995 (previously it was called the Upper Lyceum and was under the direction of the Education Division). The College is governed by a Board and has a student elected Council with its two representatives on the Board. (Eurydice, 2007).

Structure and organization of the education system

Malta: structure of the education system (2007)



Source: Ministry of Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, August 2009.

Pre-school education

Pre-primary education (kindergarten) caters to children from 2 years and nine months to 4 years and nine months (prior to October 2007, the entry age was 3 years). Pre-primary education is not compulsory. Kindergartens in the state sector are usually attached to primary schools, while non-state kindergartens are frequently stand-alone institutions. Daycare centres cater to infants from three months up to kindergarten age. They are mainly run privately and charge fees.

Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for children aged between 5 and 11 years. It lasts six years, normally divided into two three-year cycles: grades 1 to 3 or early years, and grades 4 to 6 or junior years. Up to June 2010, pupils used to sit a final examination for admission to junior lyceums (for those successful) or area secondary schools. As part of the education reform which abolishes streaming at primary level, the age 11+ examination, and tracking in secondary education, from the school year 2010/11 children sit a national examination in Maltese, English and mathematics at the end of



primary education to benchmark their achievement rather than for selection purposes, and all pupils proceed to secondary school. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

Secondary education

Compulsory secondary education (age group 11-16) lasts five years, normally divided into two cycles, i.e. years 1 and 2, and years 3 to 5. It is provided by (single gender) secondary schools and junior lyceums; boys' or girls' schools for low achievers (previously named opportunity centres) started to be phased out in 2006. Technical-vocational education is not offered at the lower secondary level. At the end of the compulsory (lower) secondary education, students sit the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examination administered by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Board of the University of Malta, or the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-level examination administered by the British examining boards. Starting from 2011 successful students are awarded a new certificate (corresponding to level 1 of the Malta Qualifications Framework) including a record of achievement based on the students' profiling throughout the compulsory secondary education cycle. The SEC is an entry qualification to post-compulsory/upper secondary education. There are three main institutions providing post-compulsory general education at the upper secondary level, namely the Higher Secondary School, the Junior College (within the University of Malta) and Sir M. Refalo Centre for Further Studies in Gozo. These institutions offer a two-year general/academic programme leading to the Matriculation Certificate awarded by the University of Malta and/or the GCE A-level, which are an entry requirement to tertiary education. Technical and vocational education at the upper secondary level is offered by the Institute of Tourism Studies, the Institute for Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage, and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) through its affiliated institutes. The duration of programmes leading to the ordinary technician diploma or to a technical certificate/diploma is normally two years. Most of the vocational training programmes offered at MCAST are BTEC (British Business and Technology Education Council) courses, which are qualifications accredited by EDEXCEL and recognized on the United Kingdom qualifications framework. One-year programmes lead to the award of the MCAST-BTEC first diploma, while two-year programmes lead to the MCAST-BTEC national diploma. Programmes leading to the MCAST-BTEC higher national diploma take two years to complete and are for Matriculation Certificate holders or graduates from two-year technical certificate/diploma programmes. MCAST institutes also offer a variety of one-year foundation and intermediate certificate programmes.

Higher education

The main provider of tertiary education is the University of Malta, an autonomous and self-governing body totally funded by the government. Private institutions provide programmes of foreign universities. The University offers programmes at graduate and postgraduate levels. A wide range of certificate (requiring one semester of study) and diploma/higher diploma programmes (lasting one to one and a half years) is also offered to holders of the Matriculation Certificate. Bachelor's degree programmes last three to four years; long-cycle first degree programmes last five years in the case of medicine, dentistry, pharmacy, architecture and theology. The award of a postgraduate certificate requires six months of study (one semester), and a



postgraduate diploma takes one year to complete. Programmes leading to the award of a master's degree normally last one and a half to two years after the bachelor's degree, and doctoral degree programmes normally take three to five years to complete on a full-time basis (a minimum of four years on a part-time basis).

Teaching in state schools normally commences on the fourth Monday in September and ends on 6 July or on the day prior to the commencement of the annual examinations. Teachers in in-service training attend school from 15 September to 14 July. All teachers attend school two working days prior to the fourth Monday in September. The school day consists of 5.5 hours between the end of September and the end of May, and of 3.75 hours between 1 June and the end of the school year. A typical school year comprises about 32 teaching weeks (or about 160 teaching days), not including examination periods and staff development days/in-service courses. The number of teaching days may vary slightly from one year to another. The school year 2009/10 comprised 179 school days at the compulsory education level, for a total of 942.5 schooling hours. (MECYS, August 2009).

The educational process

The 1988 Education Act empowers the Minister of Education to establish and monitor the National Minimum Curriculum. National minimum curricula for the pre-primary, primary, secondary and post-secondary levels bind all schools, both state and non-state.

The process of reviewing and strengthening the National Minimum Curriculum that had been established for the first time in 1989 was set in motion in 1995 with the publication of *Tomorrow's Schools: developing effective learning cultures*, and continued with the 1998 publication of a new draft curriculum. This document spearheaded a dialogue process involving major stakeholders in the educational field that eventually resulted in the formulation of this final document. The implementation of the revised curriculum started in October 2000.

A committee, known as the Strategy Building Team, was established in 1996 within the Department of Curriculum Development, Implementation and Review; it was entrusted with the responsibility of proposing a curriculum review strategy and to set in motion a consultation process. A Steering Committee was subsequently set up to implement the review strategy. This Committee met for the first time in February 1997. The committee was composed of representatives of the following bodies: the Education Division within the Ministry of Education, the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta, the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT), state schools, the Association of Private Schools, the Association of School Councils, and the National Youth Council. The Committee met regularly and constantly kept contact with stakeholders.

The Committee engaged in a broad and continuous process of consultation enabled the Steering Committee to gain a broad perspective of diverging stakeholder views. Moreover, the Committee engaged in consultations with specialists, administrators and practitioners. Decisions covering a wide range of curricular fields were reached after meticulous research and long discussions.



Following a detailed analysis and exploration of various possibilities, the Committee reached an agreement on the majority of points mentioned in the document it submitted to the then Minister of Education and National Culture on March 1998. All teachers received a copy of the published draft National Curriculum. Two copies were also sent to every school council, to all public libraries and to every Local Council. An immediate public reaction was registered. Themes provoking most reaction were: the removal of streaming at primary level; the abolition of the tripartite system at secondary level; the new method of assessment; and the policy concerning the official languages.

Between November 1998 and January 1999, the Minister of Education carried out several meetings with special interest groups. These meetings focused on the official languages, church schools and the world of work. Greater awareness of the draft document's content was also generated, between April 1998 and March 1999, by newspapers (articles, letters to the editor and editorials) as well as radio and television stations.

The Minister received the first draft of the final document in April 1999. Following other changes, the final version approved by the Minister of Education was presented to the Government on 20 September 1999. The Cabinet discussed the document and formally decided to adopt it and to forward it to the Parliamentary Social Affairs Committee for its consideration prior to the final publication.

The principles that shaped the revised curriculum of 1999 are the following: quality education for all; respect for diversity; stimulation of analytical, critical and creative thinking skills; education relevant for life; stable learning environment; nurturing commitment; holistic education; inclusive education; gender equality; more formative assessment; strengthening of bilingualism in schools; vocation and competence; increasing participation in curriculum development; decentralization and identity.

The policy document *For all children to succeed* (2005) set out the initial landscape for the setting up of the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) and the Directorate for Educational Services (DES), as well as different models for the College network set up in Malta and Gozo. The document proposed that the ownership of curriculum design, management and implementation fall within the remit of the DQSE. This policy document acted as a precursor to amendments to the Educational Act that were discussed and adopted in 2006.

The process of reviewing and updating the national curriculum was launched in March 2008 and completed in July 2010. It included representatives from the Directorates of Education, the Faculty of Education, the MATSEC Examinations Board, and Church and independent schools. The draft document has been refined following an invitation for feedback from curriculum experts from the Ministry of Education in New Zealand and Learning and Teaching Scotland. A draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) document has been issued in April 2011 for a national consultation process after which it will be refined, finalized and adopted.

The proposed NCF draws upon previous documentation in the light of changes in society, the setting up of colleges in the state sector, the on-going transition reform



and the challenges set for education in Malta. It also takes into account the eight key competences for lifelong learning of the European Reference Framework of 2006 (i.e.: communication in the mother tongue; communication in foreign languages; mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology; digital competence; learning to learn; social and civic competences; sense of initiative and entrepreneurship; and cultural awareness and expression) and the themes which are embedded in the eight key competences, namely: critical thinking, creativity, initiative, problem-solving, risk assessment, decision-making and constructive management of feelings. The proposed NCF also aims to provide recommendations that pave the way for the education system in Malta to reach the targets set in the document *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart sustainable and inclusive growth* (2010).

The draft NCF of 2011 calls for greater responsibility at all levels as educators together with other stakeholders engage to create the essential education programme for all children to succeed. It emphasizes that education is everybody's business. The NCF assumes: a paradigm shift away from a prescriptive curriculum towards a framework which allows for some degree of internal flexibility; a move away from stand alone subjects to learning areas that form the entitlement of all learners; the continuous development of all practitioners, and ongoing support to enable them to interpret the framework and adapt it to meet the needs of their learners; and that all stakeholders in the State, Church and Independent sectors take responsibility for the proposed changes.

Hence, the NCF promotes: a clear focus on improving the quality of education and raising the level of student achievement; a readiness to depart from traditional curriculum structures and practices that may restrict learning; guidelines which allow for some a greater of choice to suit the interests and capabilities of individual learners within nationally accepted parameters; flexible learning programmes providing diverse and integrated learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners; learning programmes that focus on understanding and emphasize the process of learning and the active co-construction of meaning rather than the mere acquisition of content; learning programmes that empower teachers to implement innovative teaching and learning strategies especially through the use of e-learning; a move away from an exclusively subject-based approach that favours fragmentation and compartmentalization of knowledge to a more cross-curricular, thematic, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach that reflects real life situations and encourages transfer of skills from one learning area to another; an assessment policy that values and assesses both the processes and the products of learning; initial teacher education and further opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity; professional development that is congruent with the availability of opportunities within the extended reality of the European Union; and the development of the school as a learning community of reflective practitioners. (MEEF, 2011–Document 2).

Six general principles form the foundation of the NCF, namely: entitlement (every child is entitled to a quality education experience, therefore all learners need to be supported to achieve personal excellence); diversity; continuum of achievement (development of early childhood, primary and secondary education curricula as a seamless process and curriculum design in accordance with learning outcomes reflecting progressive development and achievement); learner-centred learning;

quality assurance; and teacher support. The draft NCF of 2011 aims at developing learners who:

- *are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners*; this requires moral and spiritual development and the development of: personal and social skills; literacy, numeracy and digital literacies; bilingualism and multilingualism; science and technology competence; critical and innovative thinking; aesthetic appreciation and creative expression.
- *are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work*; this requires: the ability to communicate effectively and confidently; competence in using new ICTs; the ability to train, re-train and develop new skills; economic stability and independence; innovation and entrepreneurship; the ability to readily embrace mobility and exchange; a systems view of reality that facilitates their engagement in the promotion of sustainable development; and active involvement in sustainable development issues.
- *are engaged citizens in constantly changing local, regional and global realities*; learners need to: respect diversity and value difference; respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage; develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts; work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice; and uphold social justice and democratic principles.

The NCF proposes an alternative perspective of curricular content which conceptualizes learning as occurring through meaningful and challenging experiences, drawing upon learners' prior knowledge, interests and dispositions. This can be best achieved through merging various subjects into learning areas to contribute to the acquisition of a body of relevant, purposeful and connected knowledge and skills that engage and motivate learners. This does not imply the elimination of traditional subject content but the establishment of links between and across subjects to reinforce learning. Discrete learning areas are not proposed for the early years (early childhood education), where the emphasis is on the development of skills and positive dispositions towards learning which will be developed and extended in later years. Learning areas are introduced in the primary years and extended into the secondary years, where learners also choose a number of optional subjects according to their interest.

Once the broad outline of the NCF is agreed, subsequent guidance will be developed by curriculum experts and content area specialists to provide more detailed and comprehensive descriptions of each learning area and the respective learning outcomes, at early, primary and secondary years. These documents will in turn be translated into syllabi and programmes of study which can be used directly in all learning and teaching contexts. Within each learning area, for primary and secondary schools these curriculum documents will identify the mandatory core curriculum as well as the flexible components that allow for different learning programmes to match the individual needs of learners.

The eight learning areas for the primary and secondary years are the following: languages (mother tongue, second language and foreign languages); mathematics;



science; technology education (including design and technology and digital literacy); health education (including physical education and sports; personal, social and health education; and aspects of home economics); religious education (understood as Catholic religious education) or an ethical education programme for young people opting out of Catholic religious education; citizenship education (including history, geography, social studies, environmental education and aspects of personal, social and health education and home economics); and arts education (including art, music, dance and drama).

The following cross-curricular themes have been identified as essential for the education of all students and for achieving the aims of education: e-learning; education for sustainable development; intercultural education; education for entrepreneurship; and creativity and innovation. Curriculum planning should take into account cross-curricular themes thus providing connecting strands interwoven with the learning areas. This gives learning areas coherence, relevance and stability providing a holistic learning experience by highlighting common objectives, content and pedagogies. Integration is effectively achieved through the specific planning choices once the individual curriculum documents are planned for each learning area. Such cross-curricular themes should, where possible, permeate every facet of the curriculum through a whole-school approach. Curriculum developers and teachers also need to keep these cross-curricular themes in mind when they prepare syllabi, schemes of work and lessons within each learning area.

The successful realization of the theoretical foundation of the NCF can be achieved by taking into consideration another four crucial components, namely: effective learning and teaching; evaluation and assessment, parental and community involvement as well as support structures.

The process of learning needs to be challenging and engaging for all learners, including the lowest and highest achievers, and to help them develop their maximum potential as lifelong learners. Learning programmes need to be competence-based rather than knowledge-based, emphasizing the process of learning over the mere acquisition of content, particularly in the context of a society where knowledge is readily accessible. In terms of curriculum design this could be achieved by considering three dimensions: content and mastery; higher order thinking (which involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation of content and concepts in some depth, and applying them in different ways and in different contexts); and use of overarching concepts and themes.

Assessment in pre-school and school settings makes an essential contribution to learning and progress at all levels. It should be seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching process, providing students and their parents with continuous, timely and qualitative feedback about children's progress, giving teachers information about their practice, and providing schools and colleges (i.e. school networks) with information about their curriculum planning, learning and teaching. Assessment *for* learning (assessment for formative purposes) is a process carried out as learning is taking place. Learners and their teachers use the outcomes to find what learners know and are able to do in relation to planned learning. They use the information and evidence gathered to make decisions about how to focus and improve future learning. Assessment *of* learning (assessment for summative purposes) is usually carried out at



the end of a unit or periodically at the end of a module, mid-year or at the end of the year. Information and judgments about learning are pulled together in a summary form for purposes of reporting to parents and sharing information with other teachers in the next class or school. If learners are fully aware of what is expected of them (the learning intentions) and the success criteria against which their learning will be evaluated, they will then develop the self-evaluation skills which will help them become self-directed learners.

Learning should be contextualized within the surrounding community, the borders of which extend beyond the immediate environs of the school. Formal educational structures should be sensitive and responsive to the realities and opportunities of the learners' environment. Additionally the community (parents, businesses/industries, local councils) – within which learners interact – should acknowledge its major role of investing in and promoting a high quality education.

Finally, the NCF recognizes that a high quality education requires a supportive infrastructure that provides the conditions and opportunities for all learners to develop their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively. This infrastructure requires on-going student services, human resources, professional development, mentoring and support for teachers and strong educational leadership. (MEEF, 2011–Documents 2 and 3).

Pre-primary education

Pre-primary education (kindergarten) caters to children from 2 years and nine months to 4 years and nine months. Kindergartens in the state sector are usually attached to primary schools, while non-state kindergartens are frequently stand-alone institutions. Several church and independent private primary schools have also kindergartens. Pre-primary education is not compulsory, but is provided free of charge in state kindergartens and almost all children attend either state or non-state institutions. Daycare centres cater to infants from three months up to kindergarten age; they are mainly run by independent private entrepreneurs and charge fees.

According to the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) of 1999, children who attend kindergarten must attain the broadest development possible. This includes intellectual, socio-emotional, physical, and moral development. The guidelines for early childhood education emphasize the importance of helping children prepare for the transition from kindergarten to the first year of compulsory schooling, in terms of behaviour as well as in terms of pre-writing and pre-numeracy skills that are required. They also emphasize the child's need to develop the historical, scientific and numerical concepts. (Eurybase, 2007).

The study *Early childhood education and care, a national policy* published in June 2006, has investigated every aspect of early childhood education provision both state and non-state, including the curriculum, the facilities, the spaces and the services, as well as the qualifications required of kindergarten assistants in order to be in a position to deliver quality education. This was followed in July 2006 with the issuing of the *National standards for child daycare facilities*. Child care aims to synchronize the care and the educational aspects of this provision to promote the holistic development and well-being of children and their families. Early childhood



development and care services provide children with the stimulation that they may not be receiving at home, presenting opportunities for them to develop at a similar rate as their peers. (*Ibid.*).

On the basis of the draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2011, the early years refer to children from birth to the age of 7. This implies that early childhood education and care starts in the home, is experienced in non-compulsory and informal settings including childcare and kindergarten and is extended into the first two years of compulsory primary school. The NCF endorses the position recommended by the 1999 NMC which regards the first two years of primary schooling as a continuation of the two-year kindergarten period. This entails that the teachers adopt a pedagogy that develops knowledge, attitudes and skills which derive from concrete experiences. The 3-7 year period, considered as the pre-conceptual phase, must be regarded as the formative period which precedes the one during which the school experience becomes more formal.

Discrete learning areas are not proposed for the early years, where the emphasis is on the development of skills and positive dispositions towards learning which will be developed and extended in later years. Emphasis should be given to general competences developed through cross-curricular themes which contribute to establishing the foundations for lifelong learning. Quality early years programmes are those which: embrace the socio-cultural dimension surrounding children's learning; are concerned with promoting and encouraging positive learning dispositions; put children at the centre of the learning environment; allow child-initiated activities acknowledging that learning in the early years is a process of co-construction and collaboration; promote activities that are related to children's real-life experiences; offer children opportunities for hands-on activities; and draw on a variety of pedagogies which address needs of particular learners. Through programmes which seek children's active involvement and experiential learning, children are expected to acquire social, communicative and intellectual competences in an environment which fosters personal well-being and positive learning dispositions. These competences can be translated into learning outcomes which young children are expected to achieve by the time they are moving from the early years to the later primary school years. The holistic development of children contributes to successful achievement of all the outcomes, i.e. children are expected to develop a strong sense of identity, gain a positive self-image, are socially adept, are effective communicators, and nurture positive attitudes towards learning becoming engaged and confident learners.

Since young children develop holistically and because learning and development do not occur in a sequential, linear fashion, compartmentalizing learning programmes by subject areas does not facilitate learning. Early years practitioners are therefore encouraged to set up learning environments which appeal to children's interests, are relevant to the common day experiences children are likely to have and which can be explored in an exciting manner. Direct, hands-on experiences encourage interaction, engagement and involvement which in turn lead to improved understanding, recall and the development of mental representations.

Assessment in early childhood education is a means of finding out what children are interested in as well as finding ways of recording and documenting their progress. For assessment to be effective and meaningful for young children,

documenting narrative accounts of their achievements can provide a more holistic reflection of what each child is truly capable of doing. Parents should have access to information and support which enable them to encourage their child's development within the home, in early years' settings and within the community through varied and diverse activities which ought to be available for children of all ages. (MEEF, 2011–Documents 2 and 3).

In state kindergartens, children are generally grouped by age in two classes (kinder 1 and kinder 2, or pre-grade classes in some non-state institutions). All state kindergartens have 5 hours 30 minutes of activity every day during the full days and 3 hours 30 minutes during half-days. Full days last from the first day of school to the end of May. On the 1 June half-days start. During full-days timetable, the school week is of 27 hours 30 minutes duration while during the half days timetable the school week is of 18 hours 45 minutes. These school times include the 15 minute mid-morning break. Children generally stay at the kindergarten during the mid-day break. It is government's policy to offer an inclusive education to all children, thus children with special needs are admitted into mainstream kindergartens unless their parents believe that their child can receive a better education and care in a special school. If a child needs special help, he/she may be provided with the required support, including a one-to-one or a shared specifically qualified facilitator, depending on the seriousness of the disability. (Eurybase, 2007).

Currently kindergarten assistants have to follow a two-year post-secondary vocational course leading to the national diploma in children's care, learning and development (corresponding to level 4 of the Malta Qualifications Framework) prior to employment. With effect from school year 2015/16 the requirement for teaching children in the early years will be a three-year bachelor of education degree in early childhood education and care. (Eurydice, 2011).

In January 2005, there were 8,858 children enrolled in 570 classes of kindergartens (all sectors). The children-teacher ratio in state kindergartens was 1:12.6.

The National Statistics Office reports that in 2007/08 there were 109 pre-primary institutions, of which 60 were state, 32 church and 17 independent institutions. The total number of children enrolled was 8,530, of whom 4,202 were girls. The total number of staff was 759 (of whom 742 were women). Out of this number, 507 were kindergarten assistants and 88 were teachers. (NSO, 2011a). In 2008/09, the total enrolment at the pre-primary level was 8,290 children, of whom 4,015 were girls. (NSO, 2011b).

Primary education

Primary education is compulsory for children aged between 5 and 11 years. The six-year programme is generally divided into two three-year cycles, i.e. grades 1 to 3 or early years, and grades 4 to 6 or junior years. Primary education is free of charge (including school transport and textbooks). Up to June 2010, pupils sat a final examination for admission to junior lyceum schools (for those successful) or area secondary schools. As part of the education reform which abolishes streaming at primary level, the age 11+ examination, and tracking in secondary education, from the



school year 2010/11 children sit a national examination in Maltese, English and mathematics at the end of primary education to benchmark their achievement rather than for selection purposes, and all pupils proceed to secondary school within their area Colleges. (CEDEFOP, 2011). There is no formal certification at the end of primary education.

Both the National Minimum Curriculum of 1999 and the National Curriculum Framework of 2011 consider the first two years of primary schooling as a continuation of the two-year kindergarten period (i.e. early years).

The Core Competences working group set up in March 2008 put forward a set of strategies to implement the national policy in the acquisition of core competences, i.e. literacy, mathematics and e-literacy (digital literacy). Checklists, to record the three competences at years 1, 2 and 3 level are being used for the early identification of children at risk. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

According to the draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2011, at the primary level (years 1 to 6) children are entitled to a stimulating, happy, safe and caring educational environment which builds on early childhood experiences, promotes the development of their full potential in all aspects of learning and paves the way for capacity-building and lifelong learning which will be strengthened at the secondary level. Education at the primary level aims at: supporting children in their journey of discovering the joy of learning; strengthening children's holistic development; and enabling children to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills, values and attitudes which will allow them to develop into lifelong learners able to progress from one level to another at their individual pace of development. The primary curriculum will assist children to develop into learners who are:

- confident, have a positive self-image, high self-esteem and are capable of nurturing healthy socio-emotional relationships;
- critical and innovative thinkers who are capable of generating creative ideas and putting them into practice;
- proficient users of Maltese and English;
- numerate and have a firm foundation in mathematical reasoning and concepts;
- scientifically literate and capable of engaging in enquiry that inculcates the love of exploration and wonder;
- digitally literate, capable of using and adapting to new technologies; and
- physically active, capable of making choices in favour of a healthy life-style.

The educational settings and experiences during the primary years aim at enhancing children's learning capacity. This is achieved through the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational activities that develop children's ability to acquire, comprehend and apply knowledge, develop and practice a wide variety of skills and key competences and internalize positive attitudes and values. Specific programmes of studies and assessment modes are to be clear, valid and relevant. (MEEF, 2011–Document 3).

According to the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) of 1999, at the primary level pupils should acquire the following skills: a) the ability to acquire knowledge, through the use of information technology and other means; b) the ability to make appropriate choices in all spheres of life regarding: moral, aesthetic, spiritual and social values; the strengthening of the Maltese personal and social identity; basic life skills and ways of learning; c) the ability to forge a systematic link between the following subjects: Maltese; English; mathematics; religion; social studies; physical education and sport; science and technology; and creative expression, by virtue of studies characterized by integrated themes rather than by compartmentalized knowledge. The NMC considers bilingualism as the basis of the education system, entailing the effective, precise and confident use of the country's two official languages. This goal is to be reached by all students by the end of their entire schooling experiences. Hence, schools are encouraged to adopt a policy of using two languages and to develop a linguistic strategy that reflects the particular linguistic needs of its pupils. Equal importance is to be given to the teaching of the first and second language at all levels and formative assessment is to provide effective remedies to individual pupils to overcome their linguistic difficulties. The NMC encourages teachers at primary level to use English when teaching English, mathematics, science and technology. Code switching is suggested when the use of English poses problems to the understanding of the subject. The NMC lists the following core subjects at primary level: Maltese, English, mathematics, religion, social studies, physical education and sport, science and technology, and creative expression. Media education and personal and social development are often integrated within the rest of the subjects and the daily life of the class. At primary level the number of daily lessons and the allocation of subjects during the day are not strictly prescribed. Schools may decide on the number of hours per week to be allocated for each subject according to the particular needs of their pupils.

The typical allocation of instructional hours per subject in 2001 is showed below:

Primary education: typical allocation of weekly hours per subject (full days)

Subject	Number of weekly hours in each grade					
	First cycle			Second cycle		
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
Religious education	2h30m	2h30m	2h30m	2h30m	2h30m	2h30m
Maltese language	5h30m	5h30m	5h30m	6h	6h	6h
English language	6h	6h	6h	6h	6h	6h
Mathematics	6h	6h	6h	6h	6h	6h
Science	45m	45m	45m	45m	45m	45m
Physical education	1h	1h	1h	1h	1h	1h
Expressive arts	30m	30m	30m	1h	1h	1h
Social studies	1h	1h	1h	2h	2h	2h
Choosing time	2h	2h	2h	–	–	–
Total weekly hours	25h15m	25h15m	25h15m	25h15m	25h15m	25h15m

Source: Information provided to the IBE by the Education Division, Ministry of Education, October 2001. The number of daily lessons is not prescribed, neither is the subject allocation during the day. Schools are free to decide on the number of weekly hours per subject on the basis of the recommendations of authorities at the central level.

The suggested time allocation per core subjects according to the guidelines of central education authorities is presented below:

Malta. Primary education: suggested time allocation per subject

Subject	Number of weekly minutes in each grade/year					
	First cycle (early years)			Second cycle (junior years)		
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Religious education	150m	150m	150m	150m	150m	150m
Maltese language	200m	200m	280m	280m	280m	280m
English language	225m	225m	320m	320m	320m	320m
Mathematics	300m	300m	300m	300m	300m	300m
Science	30m	30m	30m	30m	30m	30m
Physical education	90m	90m	90m	90m	90m	90m
Music	75m	75m	30m	30m	30m	30m
Art	150m	150m	60m	60m	60m	60m
Social studies	30m	30m	45m	45m	45m	45m
Personal & social development *						
Thinking skills *						
Total weekly hours (min.)	20h50m	20h50m	21h45m	21h45m	21h45m	21h45m

Source: Eurybase, 2007. The number of daily lessons is not prescribed, neither is the subject allocation during the day. Schools are free to decide on the number of weekly hours per subject on the basis of the guidelines of central-level authorities. (*) Time allocation (in grades 4-6) varies depending on the school. Media education and personal and social development are often integrated with the rest of the subjects.

As mentioned, the NCF 2011 indicates that the eight learning areas for primary and secondary education are the following: languages (mother tongue, second language and foreign languages); mathematics; science; technology education (including design and technology and digital literacy); health education (including physical education and sports; personal, social and health education; and aspects of home economics); religious education (understood as Catholic religious education) or an ethical education programme for young people opting out Catholic religious education; citizenship education (including history, geography, social studies, environmental education and aspects of personal, social and health education and home economics); and arts education (including art, music, dance and drama). The cross-curricular themes are: e-learning; education for sustainable development; intercultural education; education for entrepreneurship; and creativity and innovation.

The range of activities in the first two years primary education should be similar to that which is provided in the early years (kindergarten). A topic/thematic-based approach is recommended as it enriches the development of each learning area. Science, religious education, citizenship education, arts education, and health Education as learning areas all support the development of oracy, literacy, numeracy and digital literacy skills. (MEEF, 2011–Document 3).

The suggested distribution of learning time per week in years 5 and/or 6 according to the draft NCF of 2011 is shown in the table below:

Malta. Primary education: suggested distribution of learning time per week (grade 5 and/or 6)

Learning area/subject	Number of weekly hours		
	Model A	Model B	Model C
First language (English/Maltese)	3h45m	4h	3h45m
Second language (Maltese/English)	3h45m	4h	3h45m
Foreign language awareness	30m	30m	45m
Mathematics	3h45m	5h	4h30m
Science	2h	1h30m	1h30m
Technology education	45m	45m	45m
Religious education	2h30m	2h30m	2h30m
Citizenship education	2h15m	1h30m	1h30m
Arts education	2h15m	1h30m	1h30m
Health education (including physical education)	3h30m	3h45m	3h30m
School-based choice	–	–	1h
Total weekly hours	25h	25h	25h

Source: MEEF, 2011 (Document 3). It is assumed that the school year comprises 32 teaching weeks, corresponding to approximately 800 instructional hours. Health education includes an average of 30 minutes per day (or 2.5 hours a week) for physical education and sport activities. Citizenship education is an integrated learning area including history, geography, social studies, environmental education, aspects of home economics (such as the study of basic nutritional facts, skills and attitudes), and elements of personal, social and health education which overlaps with health education. Technology education includes design and technology (focusing on practical and technological skills) and digital literacy (use of information and communications technology). In grades 1 and 2 a topic/thematic approach is recommended. In grades 3 and 4, where there is no foreign language awareness programme, the school can decide how to use the allocated time.

At the end of six years of primary education, pupils used to sit the final examination for admission to junior lyceums (for those successful) or secondary schools. To some extent this examination evaluated the primary education phase by providing an audit of performance in five subjects at the age of 11 at the national level. The examination subjects were Maltese, English, mathematics, social studies and religious knowledge (unless parents object on grounds of conscience to their children being examined in religious knowledge). Since May 2011, the examination has been replaced by the End of Primary Benchmark assessment in three core subjects (English, Maltese and mathematics). The language tests include both oral and aural components. The examination is centrally set and marked, and is complemented by school-based assessment. The End of Primary Benchmark (EPB) assessments have a diagnostic function and not a selective one. (Eurydice, 2011). As part of the reform initiated in 2009, classes during the last two years of primary education are no longer streamed. The Record of Students Achievement tool was introduced in 2007 and it is a formative assessment which aims to record progress and the needs of each individual student starting from the early year and through the compulsory education. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

According to the NCF 2011, valid and reliable assessment methods are necessary to support learning, analyze each child's performance, reflect on practice, plan for further learning of individuals and groups of pupils, and allow for consistent recording and reporting on each child's overall performance. Everyday interactions



between teachers and pupils in oral and written work and other activities, and interactions among the pupils themselves provide valuable information about each child's strengths and needs. From grades/years 3 to 6 the NCF recommends school-based assessment, incorporating the assessment of oral/aural skills in Maltese and English. The assessment process provides parents, teachers and the school administration with an overview of each child's development in terms of levels of achievement. From year 4 the process becomes more formalized with the introduction of examinations in conjunction with other forms of assessment. The combination of approaches should help parents, teachers and school management to obtain a clearer picture of the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes of individual pupils in the different learning areas. The moderation of school-based assessment and marking of examinations will ensure consistency in the application of assessment criteria across schools and colleges. At the end of year 6, the national end-of-primary benchmark in mathematics, Maltese and English will be set and marked centrally to provide national benchmarks. Whilst these examinations are compulsory for children attending state schools, schools in the church and independent sectors may also participate. The examination will be used to record the achievement of pupils at the end of the primary years and provide important information to receiving secondary schools about the learning of individual pupils. (MEEF, 2011–Document 3).

Generally speaking, pupils do not repeat classes, unless it is in their own interest. The drop-out rate for both primary and secondary levels of education is low. Teachers are expected to correct and mark their pupils' work and to assess their attainment regularly in order to award an assessment mark when half-yearly and annual examinations results (administered as from year 4) are sent to parents. Assessment is based on a 100 point scale. (Eurybase, 2007).

In 2004/05 there were 29,064 pupils enrolled in 112 primary schools (of which 74 in the public sector). The total number of educational staff was 2,204, including 850 teachers and 649 assistants to pupils with special education needs.

The National Statistics Office reports that in 2007/08 there were 26,772 pupils enrolled at primary level, of whom 13,050 were girls. The total number of staff was 2,663 (of whom 2,353 were women). Out of this number, 1,419 were teachers, 109 were instructors and 871 were learning support assistants. The average pupil-teacher ratio at the primary level was 10.4:1. (NSO, 2011a).

In 2008/09 the total enrolment at the primary level was 25,725 pupils, of whom 12,579 were girls. The total enrolment in special schools was 221 pupils, of whom 76 were girls. The number of teaching staff at the pre-primary and primary level (including staff not directly engaged in teaching such as administrators and facilitators) was 3,375, of whom 3,070 were female teachers. The number of staff in special schools was 154, of whom 132 were women. (NSO, 2011b). Data collected in October 2008 showed that the number of students with a special needs statement attending mainstream state schools stood at 1,588. (MECYS, 2009.).

Secondary education

As mentioned, compulsory secondary education lasts five years, normally divided into two cycles, i.e. years 1 and 2, and years 3 to 5. It is provided by (single gender)



secondary schools and junior lyceums; technical-vocational education is not offered at the lower secondary level, but there are plans to include vocational subjects. Prior to the introduction of the college system (i.e. network of schools) students could attend either junior lyceums or secondary schools depending on the results of the junior lyceum entrance examination taken at the end of primary education. The college system brings both streams together in one school (a secondary school) and students are set for the core subjects. At the end of the compulsory (lower) secondary education, students sit the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examination administered by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Board of the University of Malta, or the General Certificate of Education (GCE) O-level examination administered by the British examining boards. Starting from 2011 successful students are awarded a new certificate (corresponding to level 1 of the Malta Qualifications Framework) including a record of achievement based on the students' profiling throughout the compulsory secondary education cycle. The SEC is an entry qualification to post-compulsory/upper secondary education.

There are three main institutions providing general education at the upper secondary level, namely the Higher Secondary School, the Junior College (attached to the University of Malta) and Sir M. Refalo Centre for Further Studies in Gozo. These institutions offer a two-year general/academic programme leading to the Matriculation Certificate awarded by the University of Malta and/or the GCE A-level, which are an entry requirement to tertiary education. Upper secondary education is co-educational.

Technical and vocational education at the upper secondary level is offered by the Institute of Tourism Studies, the Institute for Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage, and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) through its affiliated institutes. The duration of programmes leading to the ordinary technician diploma or to a technical certificate/diploma is normally two years. Most of the vocational training programmes offered at MCAST are BTEC (Business and Technology Education Council) courses, which are qualifications accredited by EDEXCEL and recognized on the United Kingdom qualifications framework. One-year programmes lead to the award of the MCAST-BTEC first diploma, while two-year programmes lead to the MCAST-BTEC national diploma. Programmes leading to the MCAST-BTEC higher national diploma take two years to complete and are for Matriculation Certificate holders or graduates from two-year technical certificate/diploma programmes. MCAST institutes also offer a variety of one-year foundation and intermediate certificate programmes.

According to the draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) of 2011, the secondary education cycle (years 7 to 11) consolidates and builds upon the learning experiences of primary education and prepares learners for the wider challenges they will face beyond compulsory schooling. Education at this level should:

- provide learners with a period of adjustment allowing them to familiarize themselves with the procedures of secondary education and an opportunity to address any unresolved issues (knowledge and skills) related to the primary years;
- expose learners to a wider perspective of knowledge and wisdom that goes beyond their experiences in the primary years;



- ensure that learners deepen their understanding and aptitude in specific learning areas;
- equip learners with the required skills and competences necessary to adapt to a society characterized by change and to function successfully in their immediate community and beyond;
- promote the development of the whole person by helping learners deal with growing up physically (issues related to health, puberty and sexuality), psychologically (issues related to mental development and health and management of stress), emotionally (issues related to positive and negative feelings); socially (issues related to interpersonal skills, peer pressure and conflict resolution) and spiritually (issues related to ethics and values);
- provide learners with experiences, competences and understanding that prepare them for lifelong learning and empower them to make wise choices for their future; and
- prepare learners for achieving qualifications and certification that are relevant for further learning and employment. (MEEF, 2011–Document 3).

According to the (draft) NCF 2011, the curriculum at the secondary level is structured around the same learning areas (i.e. languages; mathematics; science; technology education; health education; religious education; citizenship education; and arts education) and cross-curricular themes (i.e. e-learning; education for sustainable development; intercultural education; education for entrepreneurship; and creativity and innovation) as in primary education.

The tables below show the weekly lesson timetables of the secondary school and the junior lyceum in 2009/10, as well as the suggested distribution of lessons in years 7 to 11 according to five alternative curriculum framework timetables included in the NCF 2011.

Malta. Lower secondary education (secondary school): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade/year				
	7	8	9	10	11
Maltese language	4	4	4	4	4
English language	5	5	5	5	5
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5
Religion	2	2	2	2	2
Social studies	1	1	1	1	1
Integrated science	4	4	–	–	–
Physics	–	–	4	4	4
History	1	1	1	1	1
Geography	1	1	1	1	1
ICT	1	1	1	1	1
Physical education	2	2	1	1	1
Music/Literature/Art	1	1	1	1	1
Personal and social development	2	2	1	1	1
Language (in addition to Maltese and English)	4	4	4	4	4
Option	–	–	4	4	4
Option chosen in year 1	2	2	–	–	–
Total weekly periods	35	35	35	35	35

Source: Eurybase, 2007. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes.

Malta. Lower secondary education (junior lyceum): weekly lesson timetable

Subject	Number of weekly periods in each grade/year				
	7	8	9	10	11
Maltese language	3	3	3	3	3
English language	5	5	5	5	5
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	5
Religion	2	2	2	2	2
Social studies	1	1	1	1	1
Integrated science	4	4	–	–	–
Physics	–	–	4	4	4
History	2	2	1	1	1
Geography	2	2	1	1	1
ICT	1	1	1	1	1
Physical education	2	2	1	1	1
Music/Literature/Art	2	2	–	–	–
Personal and social development	2	2	1	1	1
Language (in addition to Maltese and English)	4	4	4	4	4
Option I	–	–	4	4	4
Option II	–	–	4	4	4
Option chosen in year 1	2	2	–	–	–
Total weekly periods	37	37	37	37	37

Source: Eurybase, 2007. Each teaching period lasts 45 minutes. During the five-day week, there are 7 lessons during three full days and 8 lessons during the other two full days. During half days (from the beginning to end June) each lesson lasts 30 minutes.

Malta. Secondary education (junior years, years 7 and 8): suggested distribution of lessons per week according to five alternative curriculum framework timetables

Subject	Number of weekly lessons in each grade/year				
	A	B	C	D	E
English language	5-4	5-4	5-4	6	5
Maltese language	4-5	4-5	4-5	4	5
Foreign language	3	3	3	4	4
Mathematics	5	5	5	6	6
Science	4	4	4	5	5
ICT	1	1	1	1	1
Arts education (arts, literature and music)	2	2	2	2	2
Religious education	2	2	2	2	3
Health education (including physical education)	5	5	5	5	5
Citizenship education	3	5	5	3	5
Technology education/Health education, Design and technology/ Home economics (Option 1)	2	2	2	2	2
School-based choice	2	–	(2)	–	–
Total weekly lessons	38	38	38(40)	40	43

Source: MEEF, 2011 (Document 3). Each lesson lasts between 40 and 45 minutes, and preferably not less than 42 minutes when taking travel time between lessons into consideration. The curriculum framework timetables D and E refer to a six-day school week. Citizenship education is an integrated learning area combining history, geography, social studies, environmental education, and aspects from home economics and personal, social and health education. Technology education includes design and technology (resistant materials, electronics and graphic products) and digital literacy (experiences of digital literacy are to be made available through the other learning areas across the curriculum). Health education includes physical education and sports (at least three lessons per week), home economics, and personal, social and health education. Foreign language may include Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish, according to availability.

Malta. Secondary education (senior years, years 9 to 11): suggested distribution of lessons per week according to five alternative curriculum framework timetables

Subject	Number of weekly lessons in each grade/year				
	A	B	C	D	E
English language	5–4	5–4	5–4	5	5
Maltese language	4–5	4–5	4–5	4	5
Foreign language	3	3	3	3	4
Mathematics	5	5	5	5	6
Core science	4	4	4	4	4
ICT	1	1	1	1	1
Design and technology/ Home economics and Arts education	2	2	2	2	2
Religious education	2	2	2	2	3
Health education (including physical education)	3	2	2	3	4
Citizenship education	3	2	2	3	2
Option 1	3	4	4	4	4
Option 2	3	4	4	4	4
School-based choice	–	–	(2)	–	–
Total weekly lessons	38	38	38(40)	40	43

Source: MEEF, 2011 (Document 3). Each lesson lasts between 40 and 45 minutes, and preferably not less than 42 minutes when taking travel time between lessons into consideration. The curriculum framework timetables D and E refer to a six-day school week. At the end of year 8, students generally opt for two additional subjects which will also include vocational subjects (four vocational subject areas will be piloted in 2010/11, namely engineering, hospitality, IT practitioner, and health and social care). Students who do not wish to specialise in science continue with core science leading to a SEC examination; students who wish to specialise in science can opt for two or three of the following: life sciences, physical sciences and materials science leading to a SEC examination in each of these options. Citizenship education is an integrated learning area combining history, geography, social studies, environmental education, and aspects from home economics and personal, social and health education. Students are given the opportunity to take history, geography, social studies, environmental studies, and European studies as optional subjects. Technology education includes design and technology (resistant materials, electronics and graphic products) and digital literacy (experiences of digital literacy are to be made available through the other learning areas across the curriculum). Health education includes physical education and sports (at least three lessons per week), home economics, and personal, social and health education. Home economics alternates with design and technology and arts education. Students can choose home economics, physical education and arts education as options. Foreign language may include Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish, according to availability. Students can choose a second foreign language as an option.

In secondary education a syllabus for each subject at the different levels is provided but each school is empowered to develop programmes that meet the specific curricular needs of its students. In addition to the compulsory subjects, students may choose a compulsory elective subject during the first two years of secondary education. After two years of secondary education, students choose a further one/two elective(s). Textbooks, which are selected through consultation between the Education Officer with the subject teacher, are provided free of charge by the school at the beginning of the school year and they are collected at the end of the year. The teaching methods used by the teacher depend on the needs of the students and the subject profile.



The system of formative assessment implemented at primary level continues in secondary education. Students sit for the half-yearly school exams which are school-based and the end of year exams which are set centrally. There is also continuous assessment of the students' work. The new certificate awarded at the end of compulsory education since June 2011 and developed in cooperation with the Malta Qualifications Council, includes a record of achievement in formal, informal and non-formal educational experience, as well as students' attendance during the five-year cycle and the development of personal qualities. Students can be awarded a distinction, a merit or a pass, depending on their achievement. Students who do not merit a pass are issued with a certificate merely stating that they have completed secondary education. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

The aims and perspectives of the programmes offered at the upper secondary level determine the way they are run, admission requirements, programme content and financial funding. They also provide different levels and types of exams with specific certifications. Most of the courses are on a full-time day basis and their duration is mainly two years (16-18-year-olds). Students attending any course in state institutions are entitled to a maintenance grant and courses are free of charge. A number of non-state schools provide full-time general/academic education courses of two-year duration at sixth form level. Such independent educational institutions charge tuition fees. Other private educational institutes and tuition centres also offer a variety of alternative courses. (*Ibid.*).

Curricula at MCAST vary according to the way they are determined. In the case of BTEC courses, these are mainly determined by the foreign awarding board EDEXCEL although there is room for adaptation to the local industry needs. In the case of the Foundation Courses at level 2 of the Malta Qualifications Framework, the curricula have been designed based on the recommendations of the Malta Qualifications Council which stipulate that a good percentage of the curriculum needs to focus on the development of the key competences. (CEDEFOP, 2011).

In October 2005 there were 32,782 students enrolled at the secondary level (all sectors). In March 2004 there were 6,875 students enrolled in vocational education, of whom 6,334 students in programmes offered by MCAST.

The National Statistics Office reports that in 2007/08 there were 26,218 students enrolled at the secondary level. A total of 5,572 students were enrolled in postsecondary general education and 6,750 students in postsecondary vocational education. The total number of staff was 4,055 (including 2,646 women) at the secondary level, 319 (not including the Junior College) at the postsecondary general (of whom 153 were women), and 364 (including 128 women) at the postsecondary vocational level. Out of the total number of staff, 3,109 were teachers, 135 instructors and 589 learning support assistants. The average student-teacher ratio at the secondary level was 6.7:1. (NSO, 2011a).

In 2008/09 the total enrolment at the secondary level was 25,621 students, of whom 12,254 were girls. The total enrolment in vocational education programmes offered by MCAST and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) was 8,842 students, of whom 2,918 were girls. At the post-secondary level there were 5,678 students enrolled, of whom 3,304 were girls. The number of teaching staff at the secondary and



postsecondary level (including staff not directly engaged in teaching such as administrators and facilitators) was 4,488, of whom 2,879 were female teachers. The number of staff in vocational education (MCAST and ITS) was 360, of whom 125 were female teachers. (NSO, 2011b).

Assessing learning achievement nationwide

The Directorate for Quality and Standards (DQSE) of the Ministry of Education is responsible for the quality and standards in education, from age 3 to 16. The Malta Qualifications Council is responsible for the Malta Qualifications Framework which provides learners with a map of all levels of qualifications, of entry and exit points at every level of qualifications as well as levels of qualifications by sector and by occupation. The National Commission for Higher Education is responsible for the quality assurance of further and higher education. These three institutions work in collaboration to establish and maintain standards in the context of the national qualifications framework considered a fundamental tool for quality assurance.

The Quality Assurance Department within the DQSE provides the required guidelines for the development plan and internal review process of each school. It also carries out an external review (so termed – as opposed to audit – to emphasize the idea of viewing again the internal evaluative mechanisms) of every school. The two complementary cycles of the internal evaluation and the external review ensure that the principles of the curriculum framework are being followed and that good practices are promoted which ultimately leads to school improvement. The Department is committed to promote within schools a culture of consistent excellence and rigour in aiming for the highest possible standards. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

A national literacy survey was carried out in March 1999 in order to evaluate the proficiency in both English and Maltese. The sample consisted of 4,554 7-year old children in 100 schools (practically all the 7-year-olds). A second survey was carried out on the same cohort three years later in order to assess the impact of remedial actions taken to improve the performance of those children who did not do so well in the first survey. The results were very positive. The Department of Planning and Development carried out a national mathematics baseline study of children attending the first year of primary education. The Department worked closely with the Faculty of Education, University of Malta and the National Foundation of Educational Research, United Kingdom. Variables considered were gender, age, language special educational needs, years of pre-school, class size, types of school, geographical districts, family structure and parents' level of education. This study provided an insight into the children's performance across these variables. (Eurybase, 2005).

The results of the Program for International Students Assessment (PISA) for 2010 showed that Malta's students were estimated to have an average score significantly higher than for the lowest performing OECD country, Mexico. The Maltese average was statistically the same as those for Serbia, Costa Rica and Bulgaria. Girls significantly outperformed boys and have the largest gender gap in reading across all 74 PISA 2009 and PISA 2009+ participants. Results showed that 64% of students in Malta are estimated to have a proficiency in reading literacy that is at or above the baseline needed to participate effectively and productively in life. This

compares to 81% in the OECD countries, on average. Malta is notable among PISA 2009+ participants in that it has a relatively large proportion of advanced readers but also a relatively large proportion of poor and very poor readers in the population.

The Maltese students' estimated mathematical literacy average was the same as that estimated for students from Greece, and higher than those from the OECD countries Israel, Turkey, Chile and Mexico. In Malta, 66% of students are proficient in mathematics at least to the baseline level at which they begin to demonstrate the kind of skills that enable them to use mathematics in ways that are considered fundamental for their future development. This compares to 75% in the OECD countries, on average. In Malta, there was a statistically significant gender difference in mathematical literacy, favouring girls.

Maltese students were estimated to have an average score on the scientific literacy scale that was statistically the same those observed in the OECD countries Turkey and Israel and significantly higher than those estimated for two other OECD countries, Chile and Mexico. In Malta, two-thirds of students are proficient in science at least to the baseline level at which they begin to demonstrate the science competencies that will enable them to participate actively in life situations related to science and technology. There was a statistically significant gender difference in scientific literacy, favouring girls. This was the largest gender gap in scientific literacy among all PISA 2009 and PISA 2009+ participants, along with those observed in Jordan and the United Arab Emirates.

Teaching staff

The Education Act (1988 and subsequent amendments) stipulates the necessary qualifications for a person to be granted a permanent warrant to exercise the profession of a teacher.

Kindergarten assistants must successfully undergo a two-year pre-service education and training programme in kindergarten education and obtain a certificate in early childhood education. From October 2003, the programme was transferred to the Institute for Community Services within the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). The programme leads to the National Diploma in Early Years, a joint diploma between MCAST and the British Business and Technology Education Council (BTEC). As mentioned, with effect from school year 2015/16 the requirement for teaching children in the early years will be a three-year bachelor of education degree in early childhood education and care.

In order to teach in primary or secondary schools, teachers must have a bachelor of education (honours) or a postgraduate certificate of education (PGCE) qualification, either in primary education (if teaching in primary schools) or in a specific teaching area(s) (if teaching in a secondary school). The duration of the PGCE programme is one year and is offered to B.A. and B.Sc. graduates. Holders of appropriate professional and academic qualifications obtainable in the past also can teach. Higher and specific qualifications are normally expected if a person is to teach at a more advanced level. These programmes are provided by the Faculty of Education, University of Malta.



The B.Ed. (Honours) programme extends over a period of four years on a full-time basis. Primary school teachers are prepared to teach the eight subject areas in the primary curriculum (English, Maltese, mathematics, religion, physical education, science, expressive arts and social studies, according to the National Minimum Curriculum of 1999). The programme also covers other areas including: assessment, health education, disability, literacy difficulties, environmental education, and psycho-social and legal issues amongst others. General pedagogy and interpersonal skills are given importance in the initial years of the programme. Newly recruited teachers are provided with induction courses. The topics covered during the induction courses are the national education structure and the structure of the Education Directorates, educational reforms and policies, aspirations and concerns of teachers, the induction and mentoring programme, the reflective journal and the Performance Management Professional Development Programme. All teachers have a statutory requirement to attend an annual in-service course as part of their continuous professional development. Besides after-school professional development sessions are held at school level. These courses may be offered at College level or at national level.

The Quality Assurance Department in collaboration with the Department for Human Resource Development launched a Teacher Induction and Mentoring Policy and Strategy for the state sector. The Strategy envisages training for education officers, heads of school, assistant heads, heads of department and prospective teacher mentors according to their role in the policy. A training programme is currently being organised to upskill the above mentioned staff to be able to take on formal mentoring duties, which are part of their terms of reference. (EURYDICE, CEDEFOP and ETF, 2009/10).

Secondary and higher secondary school teachers should hold a bachelor's degree in education (honours) with the specialized area. Students who have completed a B.A./B.Sc. degree and would like to enter the teaching profession could opt to follow a one-year (full-time) postgraduate certificate in education (PGCE). During both programmes (bachelor's and PGCE) the students have teaching practice attachments in schools. During their B.Ed. (Hons.) programme, students follow common components like school experience, classroom observation and teaching practice placements which take place throughout all the years and the writing up and presentation of a dissertation in the final year. The programme content includes educational studies incorporating educational psychology, philosophy and sociology. Prospective secondary and higher secondary teachers can choose to specialize in one subject. There is the possibility of double-subject specialization in most of the humanities areas. Higher secondary teachers can be holders of a PGCE taken after a first degree with an area of specialization. Teachers can further their education/qualifications by following a master's and/or doctoral degree programme in the Faculty of Education. The academic staff at the Junior College (attached to the University of Malta) holds a lecturing status. Lecturers must be in possession of at least a first degree related to the area of teaching and at least five years' teaching experience. Most lectures have postgraduate degrees. In the case of MCAST, lecturers must be in possession of a relevant first degree, an approved professional teacher training qualification and three years' teaching experience. (*Ibid.*).

Working conditions and salary scales of teaching grades at primary and secondary education levels have been negotiated as a collective agreement between the government and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) and have been revised a number of times. State school teachers, as public service employees, have an indefinite contract of work following a year's probation. Non-state school teachers generally enjoy the same salary scales and conditions of work. During the probation year, newly employed teachers generally receive support from the head of school, the assistant head(s), the subject coordinator, and from their peers at the school level. Classroom support is provided by a facilitator when in the class there are students with special needs. In 2001 an addendum to the existing agreement between the government and the MUT was signed that responded to some extent to the new demands made on teachers following the introduction of the new National Minimum Curriculum. Progression of teachers from one salary scale to another became faster and more in-service education and training for all teachers was introduced, besides other benefits. In 2004 a new collective agreement was signed between the MCAST and the MUT. Primary school teachers can be asked to attend an in-service course once a year, either at the beginning or at the end of the school year. If they are not specifically called to attend a compulsory course, they may apply for a course of their choice. Generally these courses lasting three days are organized at the national level, although more courses are being organized at school or College level. The 2001 addendum to the 1994 collective agreement also provides for in-service courses at any time during the school year. In addition to the possibility of being called to attend one in-service course every year teachers are required to participate in three sessions of two hours each after school hours over the school year. These sessions are dedicated to professional, curriculum and school development issues in which all school teaching grades participate. Attendance at these sessions is remunerated at overtime rate. (Eurybase, 2005 and 2007).

Teachers work 27.5 hours every week, 5.5 hours per day (including the mid-morning break) from Monday to Friday, from the fourth Monday in September to 31 May; and 3.75 hours per day, that is 18.75 hours a week (including the mid-morning break), from 15 September to the Friday preceding the fourth Monday in September, and from 1 June to 14 July. Teachers in primary schools are continuously in class contact except when peripatetic teachers take over their class for specialized subjects, such as science and technology, personal and social development, physical education, art and drama, and ICT. The teaching load in secondary schools does not exceed a maximum of 26 periods of 45 minutes each per week (including replacements during full days) and 30 minutes each during half days.

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Web resources

Department of Examinations: <http://www.exams.gov.mt/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.]

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Curriculum Management and e-Learning Department: <http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.]

Institute of Tourism Studies: <http://www.its.edu.mt/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.].

Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology: <http://www.mcast.edu.mt/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.]

Malta Qualifications Council: <http://www.mqc.gov.mt/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.]

MATSEC Examinations Board, University of Malta: <http://www.um.edu.mt/matsec/> [In English; some resources in Maltese. Last checked: April 2012.]

Ministry of Education and Employment: <https://education.gov.mt/> [In Maltese and English. Last checked: April 2012.]

National Commission for Higher Education: <https://www.nche.gov.mt/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.].

Education Portal (Schoolnet): <http://skola.gov.mt/skola/home/> [In English. Last checked: April 2012.]

University of Malta: <http://www.um.edu.mt/> [In Maltese and English. Last checked: April 2012.].

For more detailed and updated information consult EURYDICE, the information network on national education systems and policies in Europe:
http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

For updated links, consult the Web page of the International Bureau of Education of UNESCO: <http://www.ibe.unesco.org/links.htm>