

Referencing Report



Referencing the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)
to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)



and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher
Education Area (QF/EHEA)

4TH REVISED EDITION **FEBRUARY 2016**



National Commission for
**Further and
Higher Education**
Malta



MINISTRY FOR EDUCATION AND EMPLOYMENT

Acknowledgements

The fourth edition of the Referencing Report has been based on the contributions and robust Further and Higher education structure that has been built in Malta since 2012. The NCFHE would like to thank all those who participated in the consultation exercise undertaken to finalise this Referencing Report, including NCFHE employees, private and public Further and Higher education providers and other stake holders in the field. The Commission also recognises the valuable input of the international experts who reviewed this report namely:

- Dr Mike Coles, International Consultant in Qualifications Systems;
- Mr John Hart, International Consultant on Education and Training Policy;
- Mr Vincent McBride, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems;
- Dr Jim Murray, Director Of Academic Affairs, Institute of Technology Ireland;
- Mr Lemalu L. Sanerivi, Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

Prof Suzanne Gatt has guided the consultation process, gathered information and feedback, and drafted this edition of the Referencing Report. Proof reading has been undertaken by Mr David Bonello.

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Preamble



The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) has been entrusted with the regulation of the Further and Higher education sector in Malta, making sure that the Malta Qualifications Framework is respected throughout.

The main aim of the fourth edition of the Referencing Report is to have a more user-friendly document which can be easily used nationally by education training providers, learners and employers, as well as by international professionals and entities. Whilst retaining the solid ground work presented in the previous editions and maintaining the same level of quality, this Referencing Report takes into consideration the various changes that took place within the Maltese educational sphere over the past few years.

An updated Maltese education structure is being presented in this report. It outlines the main pathways across compulsory, Further and Higher education in Malta, both within and across, the academic and VET spheres. The Malta Qualifications Framework has been updated with the insertion of two new levels: Introductory Level A and Introductory Level B. These cover the learning gained, but not yet rated at Level 1 and recognise any learning that has taken place to serve as stepping stones towards Level 1.

Another update in this Referencing Report is the change of contact hours from 6.25 hours to 5 hours per credit. This follows the principles outlined in the Bologna Process and aims to promote alternative ways of learning. It also introduces a number of parameters in order to guide the accreditation of work-based learning, including apprenticeships.

To provide a clearer picture of the relationship between Levels and credits, this report further explains the amount of credits required according to the MQF Level and qualification. This shall further improve clarity and comparability of qualifications. On the same terms, in line with the Bologna Process Requirements, this report introduces the Short Cycle Qualification with 120 credits at Level 5 on the MQF. Another innovation is the reduction of the amount of credits for the accreditation of courses by NCFHE from a minimum of 4 credits to 1 credit.

Despite these improvements, the NCFHE still recognises that a number of challenges still need to be addressed.

Whilst retaining the solid ground work presented in the previous editions and maintaining the same level of quality, this Referencing Report takes into consideration the various changes that took place within the Maltese educational sphere over the past few years.

There is the need to develop and promote a more modular concept as building blocks for qualifications. Such an approach would support lifelong learners for non-traditional learners. Another growing need is the development of accreditation and quality assurance parameters for digital/online learning as well as work-based learning. The National Quality Assurance Framework still needs to develop further and cater better for these areas. A more widespread permeability of students between general education and vocational streams is also very important, as well as better integration of non-formal learning within mainstream education routes.

As a final note, I would like to thank Hon. Evarist Bartolo, Minister for Education & Employment; Mr Joseph Caruana, Permanent Secretary; Mr Martin Scicluna, Chairman NCFHE; and all the NCFHE Board Members for their support and policy direction. I hope that this updated version not only brings positive changes within the Maltese education system, but also stimulates further discussion on how we can further improve our practices. In addition, I am optimistic that this report shall further assist at both national and international levels to further enhance our students' learning experience as well as build on the mutual understanding between Malta and other countries.

Edel Cassar

Chief Executive Officer
National Commission
for Further & Higher Education



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List of Acronyms

CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Languages
CVET	Continuous Vocational Education and Training
DQSE	Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
ECVET	European Credits in Vocational Education and Training
EEA	European Economic Area
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ENIC-NARIC	European Network of Information Centres in the European Region National Academic Recognition Information Centres - European Union
EQA	European Qualifications Framework
EQAVET	European Quality Assurance in Vocational Education & Training
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
ESF	European Social Fund
ETC	Employment and Training Corporation
ETF	European Training Foundation
EU	European Union
GRTU	General Retailers and Traders Union
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
ILO	International Labour Office
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
ITS	Institute of Tourism Studies
IVET	Initial Vocational Education and Training
KC	Key Competences
MATSEC	Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate
MCAST	Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology
MEDE	Ministry for Education and Employment
MQC	Malta Qualifications Council
MQF	Malta Qualifications Framework
NCF	National Curriculum Framework
NCFHE	National Commission for Further and Higher Education
NET-QAPE	Network of Quality Assurance Professionals in Further & Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
QA	Quality Assurance
QAD	Quality Assurance Department
QF/EHEA	Qualifications Framework /European Higher Education Area
QRIC	Qualifications Recognition Information Centre

SEC	Secondary Education Certificate
SPBEA	Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Professional Assessment
SS	Sectoral Skills
SSC&P	Secondary School Certificate and Profile
TQF	Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Small states of the Commonwealth
UK	Underpinning Knowledge
UOM	University of Malta
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VINFL	Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning
VUSSC	Virtual University for Small states of the Commonwealth

Background to the Referencing Process in Malta

The publication of Legal Notice 347 of 2005 was the cornerstone of the establishment of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and the introduction of the level descriptors on a national basis. The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) was the body responsible to elaborate and guide a two-year consultation period

This process captured national qualifications and consolidated them on an 8 level framework. The consultation process included public and private training providers, the University of Malta, trade unions, employers' associations, student representatives, parents' associations, political parties, NGOs, government entities, designated authorities and the general public. The MQC led the way through numerous conferences and a series of information sessions with the target audience.

The launch of the MQF in June 2007 was a very important first step to build an entire system of quality qualifications. Subsequently, the referencing process ensured that qualifications are valuable and worthwhile learning experiences across all sectors; that learning allows learners the freedom without bureaucratic constraints; and third that it allows the formation of a knowledge-based workforce.

In November 2007, Prof James Calleja was appointed the first Malta representative on the EQF Advisory Group, thus permitting Malta to be part of the discussion on policy recommendations at EU level.

On-going consultation meetings with key players of the referencing process were led by MQC. Drafting of the first Referencing Report commenced in September 2008 and in June 2009 this was reviewed by the Referencing Steering Committee and the international experts. The Referencing Steering Committee was led by the MQC and included 4 national and 3 international experts. Subsequently, the widely consulted Referencing Report was launched on the 4th November 2009 by the MQC with the support of the European Commission Representation in Malta.

Between 2009 and 2012, the second and third revised editions were issued by the MQC with the third revised edition being also used as guidelines for accreditation parameters mirroring the legal developments and the changing Further & Higher education sphere in Malta.

Thanks to the solid, sterling work of the MQC, NCFHE can now embark on further consolidating the established parameters to ensure continued relevance of the various concepts, principles and structures of the Referencing Report both on a national and international level.



Message from the Minister for Education & Employment



The fourth edition of the Referencing Report for Malta is another indication of our commitment towards the continuous improvement of high quality further and higher education in Malta.

Thanks to this document, we are not only giving direction to national professionals in the field, but also to international stakeholders. Most importantly, this document gives reassurance to students that our education system is trustworthy and their interests are being safeguarded.

The learning experience is incessantly evolving. New methods of learning are being introduced, student mobility is on the increase, and the student profile has changed. It is very important to keep abreast with what is happening not only on a national level, but also on international grounds, in order to maintain our high level of education standards. Otherwise, we would not be in a position to identify students' needs and highlight areas for improvement.

Whilst widening and enhancing access to educational opportunities internationally is very important, the quality of teaching and learning has to be maintained. The National Commission

for Further and Higher Education, also through the Referencing Report, has the obligation of ensuring this. The Referencing Report sets the criteria with which educational institutions who wish to operate in Malta have to abide with, as well as the guidelines on how qualifications are to be referenced across the Malta Qualifications Framework. These two very important aspects ensure the transparency, portability and quality of the qualifications students are hardly working for.

Inclusive education is another important concept that we must keep in mind. After various consultations, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education is introducing the Introductory Level A and Introductory Level B on the Malta Qualifications Framework. These two levels give those individuals who have not yet managed to reach Level 1, the satisfaction that they still have their level of education recognised, and the motivation of working further towards reaching the first level of the Framework.

Our further and higher education system is the building block of democratic society. We must further encourage students to develop their knowledge, skills and competences and instil in them the desire to learn, and keep on learning.

Hon. Evarist Bartolo



Introduction to the Referencing Report

The fourth edition of the Referencing Report for Malta is another indication of our commitment towards the continuous improvement of high quality further and higher education in Malta.

The Referencing Report is Malta's national document that references the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It describes the Malta Qualifications Framework and the different levels of qualifications in Malta. It provides details of the parameters which need to be adhered to by any conferring awarding body in Malta in terms of the level of learning outcomes and number of credits. This report also describes the referencing process to other Qualifications Frameworks: the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF/EHEA); and the Transnational Qualifications Framework of the Small states of the Commonwealth (TQF). This referencing process allows the recognition of national qualifications at a European level and the recognition of foreign qualifications from the European Union and beyond.

The publication of the Referencing Report is the responsibility of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE).

NCFHE is responsible for the implementation of the Malta Qualifications Framework, the National Quality Assurance Framework and qualifications recognition as part of the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes. It also acts as the National Coordination Point for the European Qualifications Framework, ReferNet, and also forms part of the ENIC-NARIC Network.

The first edition of the Referencing Report for Malta was published in 2009. Malta was the first country (as recognised also by the Council of Europe) to reference its framework to two European overarching frameworks (EQF and QF-EHEA) as well as the TQF. This fourth updated edition reflects the changes that the education and training sector in Malta has undergone in the past two years¹.

This report describes how the Malta Qualifications Framework has evolved and adapted to reforms in the national education system since the 3rd edition. Among new developments, it covers the undergoing major reform in the assessment processes in compulsory education. This reform involves a shift from a system of an external summative assessment at the end of compulsory education to one which is school-based through the Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSC&P).

The report also reflects developments in the Further and Higher education sector, mainly the development of the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education.

What is the Referencing Process and why is it important?

The Recommendation of the Council and the European Parliament of 2008 established the European Qualifications Framework. It included a set of descriptors indicating the learning outcomes relevant to qualifications at that level in any system of qualifications across Europe. The same recommendation invited EU Member states 'to relate their national qualifications systems to the EQF by referencing their national qualifications levels to the relevant levels of the EQF, and where appropriate, develop national Qualifications Frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice'².

Malta established the MQF in 2007. It is based on eight levels as in the case of the EQF, facilitating the comparison of National qualifications to the EQF.

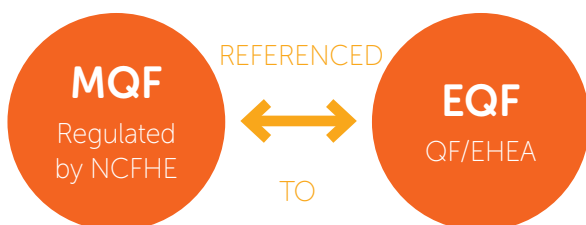


Figure 1: Diagrammatic relationship between EQF and MQF

The Referencing Report is the document which describes how the Malta Qualifications Framework is compared to the European Qualifications Framework as well as the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area.

The Referencing Report also goes further and provides accreditation parameters enabling national education training institutions to develop courses leading to qualifications with level descriptors

as stipulated by the MQF. It enables national qualifications to gain recognition both in Malta and abroad. It also makes it possible for learners obtaining qualifications from foreign institutions, in countries which have referenced their own National Qualification framework to the EQF, to have their qualifications recognised against the MQF.

The Referencing Report is relevant to different key stakeholders, mainly:

Education and Training Providers: The Referencing Report sets the parameters for all Qualifications and Awards which can be conferred in Malta. Education and training providers, mainly those operating in the Further and Higher educational sphere, must ensure that they respect these parameters if they want their courses to be accredited against the Malta Qualifications Frameworks. Thus, the Referencing Report must be at hand when designing courses in order to ensure that the level descriptors for different MQF levels, as well as the number of credits that need to be assigned in order to be able to confer qualifications and awards, are respected. While self-accrediting providers, as defined in Subsidiary Legislation 327.433, need to ascertain that they are respecting the parameters set in the Referencing Report as part of their quality assurance, other training institutions need to show NCFHE that these parameters are met when submitting their courses for accreditation.

Learners: Learners need to be aware of the MQF levels of the different courses on offer as well as whether they constitute Qualifications or Awards with respect to the Malta Qualifications Framework. In the case of foreign qualifications, learners need to be aware whether the courses they are interested in are recognised and can be referenced to the MQF.

The Referencing Report should thus be simple and clear enough to allow learners to consult to understand how course offered on the national market are placed within the MQF. This will then allow them to make more informed decisions when investing in their education.

Employers: Employers need to be aware of the difference between Qualifications and Awards as well as be familiar with the different MQF levels. The Referencing Report should thus also act as the reference document which employers can consult to understand the types of qualification that applicants possess during the recruitment process, as well as making a sound investment when they support further studies by their employees.

Social Partners: It is important for social partners to be aware of and familiar with national qualifications to ensure that employers comprehend the knowledge, skills and competences of their workers in the workplace.

Other countries: From a global perspective, it is important for National Qualifications to be recognised in other countries. The Referencing Report thus provides a detailed description of the Malta Qualifications Framework to enable an understanding of national qualifications by other countries. This is essential to promote the mutual recognition of qualifications for purposes of lifelong learning as well as for promoting the mobility of workers within a European labour market as well as at an international level.

In order for the Referencing Report to be accessible to these target groups, it is paramount that the following key elements are appreciated: the national education system; the Malta Qualifications Framework; the parameters for Qualifications and Awards; the referencing of qualifications to the MQF; and the process

of Validation of Informal and Non-Formal education are described as precisely and clearly as possible. With the 4th edition of the Referencing Report, Malta has gained a lot of experience which it can now put to use in order to make the Referencing Report a more user-friendly guide to all the stakeholders involved.

1.1 Criteria of the Referencing Report to the EQF

The success of the EQF depends on the transparency of the national referencing processes developed by individual Member states. The use of the Referencing Report influences the trust among stakeholders within and outside the country. Therefore, it is critical that the Referencing Report follows common principles in the referencing processes across Europe. The EQF expert group of the European Commission in 2008 has identified ten criteria and procedures for the referencing of national qualifications levels to the EQF. It invites Member states to develop their Referencing Report on a set of ten criteria and procedures to guide this process.³ It is important for any Referencing Report to show how the Referencing Report of a country fulfils each of these ten criteria. The following section provides details on the ten criteria for the referencing process and how these were addressed in Malta in drawing up the 4th edition of the Referencing Report.

Criterion 1: Legal Responsibility

The responsibilities and/or legal competence of all relevant national bodies involved in the referencing process, including the National Coordination Point, are clearly determined and published by the competent public authorities.

Act No. XIII of 2012, established the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) with the legal responsibility, among other things of:

- promoting and maintaining the Malta Qualifications Framework and establishing the policies and criteria on which the Framework is based;
- approving and ensuring the publication of national standards of knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes for each employment sector;
- validating Informal and Non-Formal learning and classifying such Further and Higher at a level of the Malta Qualifications Framework;
- performing the functions of the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre under the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Act;
- acting as the competent authority for licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of providers and programmes as provided by this Act or any regulation made under this Act;
- promoting and facilitating access to life-long learning and transfer and progression in lifelong learning; and
- promoting and fostering the provision of vocational education and training and its recognition in Malta and abroad.

NCFHE is responsible for maintaining the Malta Qualifications Framework and is the EQF National Coordination Point for Malta. It also runs the Qualifications and Recognition Information Centre (QRIC) which is responsible for providing the referencing and equivalence of foreign qualifications. NCFHE also accredits qualifications and short courses developed and delivered in Malta, indicating the level of learning outcomes on the MQF and the number of credits allocated. NCFHE is also responsible for the licensing and accreditation of Further and Higher Education institutions in Malta, based on the National Quality Assurance Framework. In fulfilling these responsibilities, NCFHE works closely with the Ministry for Education and Employment, as well as the state and Private Education and Training providers in Malta.

Criterion 2: Link between the National Qualifications Framework and the EQF

There is a clear and demonstrable link between the qualifications levels in the National Qualifications Framework and the level descriptors of the European Qualifications Framework.

Chapter 3 of this report describes the referencing of the MQF to the EQF, as well as with the QF/EHEA and the TQF. The link between the MQF and the EQF is in terms of progression of the levels of difficulty demonstrated through the level descriptors (Figures 7 – 14). The Malta Qualifications Framework is based on 8 levels as in the case of the EQF, with the upper four levels (5-8) also linked to the QF/EHEA. The level descriptors for each of the MQF levels are described in terms of learning outcomes, making it easier to match them with those for the EQF and QF/EHEA. The detailed descriptors in Malta are considered as the basis for ensuring a transparent referencing process. This approach is taken in order to gain and maintain trust at an international level.

Criterion 3: National Qualifications Framework based on learning outcomes, Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning and credit systems

The National Qualifications Framework and its qualifications are based on the principles and objectives of learning outcomes that are subsequently linked to Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning and, where appropriate, to credit systems.

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

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

Self-accrediting Further and Higher Education institutions are bound to follow the parameters of the MQF in terms of level descriptors and number of credits as illustrated in the Referencing Report (see Chapter 2 of this document). All other Further and Higher Education institutions are legally obliged to apply to NCFHE to accredit their Qualifications and Awards. The process of Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning has been set by Subsidiary Legislation 327.432. This Subsidiary Legislation sets the principles for the validation process. A description of the principles for the validation process is also found in Chapter 2.

Criterion 4: Transparency of procedures for the inclusion of qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework

The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the National Qualifications Framework are transparent.

The Referencing Report defines the level of learning and the workload for Qualifications and Awards in terms of credits at each level (see Chapter 2). NCFHE, through the Subsidiary Legislation 327.433⁴, was given the authority to set up the standards for the National Quality Assurance Framework through which it can regulate Further and Higher Education provision in Malta. This framework enables NCFHE to carry out external quality audits linked to the licensing of Further and Higher Education institutions in Malta. These standards will ensure transparency with respect to the conferring of qualifications and awards in Malta.

NCFHE has a national process for the accreditation of courses whereby they use learning outcomes to level-rate their programmes on the Malta Qualifications Framework. Following an independent review by experts, NCFHE chooses whether to accredit courses or not. All institutions with courses accredited by NCFHE have to fulfil the quality assurance standards as indicated in the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education.

Criterion 5: A National Quality Assurance system consistent with European principles and guidelines

The National Quality Assurance system for education and training refers to the National Qualifications Framework and is consistent with relevant European principles and guidelines (as indicated in Annex 3 of the EQF Recommendation).

Following the implementation of the ESF project 1.227 'Making Quality Visible'⁵, NCFHE has established the National Quality Assurance Framework which sets the standards for internal and external quality assurance for all Further and Higher Education providers in Malta. The process for the implementation of external audits has been finalised and guidelines published. As from May 2015, external quality audits began concurrently with the implementation of the National Quality Assurance Framework.

NCFHE has also implemented a Leonardo Da Vinci project: EQAVET Malta – A Quality Assurance Tool for VET Providers, funded by the European Commission. This project collated data about quality assurance practices in a number of VET providers in Malta to develop a manual supporting the implementation of EQAVET at a National Level.

Quality assurance for qualifications at compulsory level falls within the remit of the Quality Assurance Department (QAD), the unit within the Ministry for Education responsible for inspecting all state, independent and church schools in Malta and Gozo.

An external review is carried out which aims to support and steer all schools to enhance their functions by putting forward recommendations for progress which are then implemented by the schools and followed up by the QAD. The quality assurance system thus ensures the efficiency and quality of education provision within compulsory education, by including and enforcing assessment procedures within school settings.

Qualifications issued by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board are regulated by the Maltese Education Act (Chapter 327) and the relevant legal notices. Quality assurance procedures are indicated in the University of Malta Statutes, Regulations and By-laws published as Legal Notices in the Malta Government Gazette. These are legally binding documents which constitute the subsidiary legislation to the Education Act, Cap. 327⁶. These regulations ensure transparency and fairness in the assessment process and are subsequently followed up by the relevant authorities

Criterion 6: Referencing process refers to the National Quality Assurance Framework

The Referencing process shall include the stated agreement of the relevant Quality Assurance bodies.

The relevant quality assurance bodies in Malta are designated as such via the national legal parameters. In view of this, NCFHE is the quality assurance regulator for Further and Higher Education in Malta. Subsidiary Legislation 327.433 identifies NCFHE as the competent body for licensing, accreditation and quality assurance of all providers of Further and Higher Education programmes in Malta.

The competent quality assurance body at compulsory level of education is the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE). Quality assurance in compulsory schooling has been introduced in Malta since 2005 and a central Quality Assurance Department (QAD) has been given the responsibility to carry out external reviews (audits/inspections) as per Education Act of 2006 (Cap. 327, Part II, Article 18, (1)). An amendment to the Education Act (An ACT to amend the Education Act, Cap 327) has also given DQSE the legal basis to act as an accrediting body within compulsory education for programme of studies up to Level 3 of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Qualifications issued by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board are regulated by the Maltese Education Act (Chapter 327) and the relevant legal notices that amend this Chapter. Regulations for examinations are included in articles 74 (5) and 75 (6) of the Education Act (Cap. 327).

Criterion 7: Involvement of National Experts

The Referencing process shall involve international experts.

The fourth edition of the Referencing Report was drawn up following a consultation process with different stakeholders at a national level. National consultation involves individual interviews with different stakeholders, focus groups, feedback seminars and consultative conferences. A steering committee of key stakeholders was responsible for overseeing the whole process. The Referencing Report also involved a review by five international experts.

These experts included:

- Dr Mike Coles, International Consultant in Qualifications Systems;
- Mr John Hart, International Consultant on Education and Training Policy;
- Mr Vincent McBride, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems;
- Dr Jim Murray, Director Of Academic Affairs, Institute of Technology Ireland;
- Mr Lemalu L. Sanerivi, Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

This group of experts represent a wide range of expertise as well as geographical coverage in terms of Qualifications Frameworks.

Criterion 8: A report referencing National Qualifications Framework to the EQF

The competent national body or bodies shall certify the referencing of the national framework within the EQF. One comprehensive report, setting out the referencing and the evidence supporting it, shall be published by the competent national bodies, including the National Coordination Point, which shall address separately each of the criteria.

NCFHE, as the competent authority and the National Coordination point, is in this report describing how it has addressed each of the criteria in drawing up the Referencing Report. This fourth edition was drawn up following a four-phase consultation process involving: consultation with employees at NCFHE who use the Referencing Report for level rating, research reporting and referencing of qualifications on a daily basis; key stakeholders, such as state and Private providers of compulsory schooling, Further and Higher Education Institutions, and social partners. The first two phases served to identify issues relating to the relevance of the 3rd edition of the Referencing Report. The third phase involved three focus groups which discussed the main changes proposed for the 4th edition of the Referencing Report with respect to: National qualifications; the referencing of National Qualifications to the EQF, QF/EHEA and TQF; and the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning. The 4th phase involved a consultation process through workshops and conferences of the draft document.

The 4th edition of the Referencing Report is more concise and focused than previous editions. The process also saw the setting up of a standing Referencing Steering Committee with representatives of various stakeholders. The consultation process which spanned over six months, revealed how only parts of the Report were being used by education and training providers, and that employers were not familiar with it (see section 1.3). The new succinct edition is intended to make training providers, employers, and learners familiar with the Referencing Report as a guide for all issues pertaining to qualifications.

Criterion 9: Referencing report to be on the EQF platform

The official EQF platform shall maintain a public listing of member states that have confirmed that they completed the referencing process, including links to completed Referencing Reports.

NCFHE intends to continue updating its Referencing Report regularly to ensure that it reflects the ever-changing education sector in Malta, while ensuring that the quality and standards of National Qualifications are reflected.

As a member of the EQF expert group, NCFHE continues to participate actively at European level to ensure the compliance of European requirements in relation to the Referencing Report.

The current and forthcoming Referencing Reports will be placed on the EQF platform following official approval.

Criterion 10: Reference to the NQF and EQF in official documents and certificates

Following the referencing process, and in line with the timelines set in the Recommendation, all new qualification certificates, diplomas and EUROPASS documents issued by the competent authorities contain a clear reference, by way of National Qualifications Systems, to the appropriate European Qualifications Framework level.

It is now standard practice for any provider of education and training within Further and Higher education in Malta to indicate the MQF level as well as the number of credits of any programme of studies being offered. This Referencing Report addresses the problem of distinguishing qualifications (which are gained following a substantive programme of training) from short courses. The Referencing Report has thus set parameters in terms of credits for programmes that lead to a 'Qualification'. Programmes which do not fulfil these specified parameters are classified as 'Awards'. This demarcation was introduced to help both learners and employers distinguish between different types of certification obtained and facilitate understanding of certification in the process of recruitment and career advancement of employees (see Chapter 2). This Referencing Report describes how national qualifications placed at each level of the MQF are referenced to the EQF, as well as to other Qualifications Frameworks: the QF/EHEA and the TQF (see Chapter 3).

1.2 Consultation Process for the 4th Edition of the Referencing Report

This Referencing Report was drawn up following a four-phase consultation process taking place between March and October 2015. The first two phases were used to obtain feedback from different groups to identify issues which have emerged from past editions of the Referencing Report. The third phase involved focus groups aimed at discussing proposed changes as well as the structure of the Referencing Report. The fourth phase involved a consultation process following the publication of the draft Referencing Report. This approach made it possible to create a national ownership of the Report as well as ensure that the key issues relating to the referencing process are addressed. In addition, NCFHE set up a standing Referencing Committee made up of key stakeholders with the remit to oversee the consultation process and discuss changes and implications of decisions taken. The consultation process thus included the following:

Consultation within NCFHE: The first phase involved a series of interviews with staff in the different units within NCFHE. These interviews were carried out with the Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (QRIC), the Quality Assurance Unit; and the Research and Development Unit. Personnel at NCFHE use the Referencing Report for different purposes: to level rate and accredit national Qualifications and Awards; to reference foreign qualifications to the Malta Qualifications Framework; and for reporting and research purposes at national level. These interviews served to highlight the strengths of the 3rd edition of the Referencing Report as well as to identify difficulties and aspects which the report does not cater for due to developments in the education and training sector since its publication.

Consultation with Key Stakeholders: Following the consultation within NCFHE, a series of interviews with other key stakeholders were carried out. These interviews were carried out with the following stakeholders: the main state VET providers, MCAST and ITS; the University of Malta, the main tertiary education provider; the employees at the National Statistics Office; two private VET providers; the Directorate for Lifelong Learning; the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education responsible for compulsory education; and the General Retailers and Traders Union who besides representing enterprises, also have their own training organisation. The aim of this round of interviews served to obtain insight into the stakeholders' familiarity with the Referencing Report, which sections they use and whether there are aspects of the Referencing Report which require updating or further development.

Focus Groups: Having identified the key issues emerging from the changing and developing education and training sector in Malta, highlighted during the interviews carried out during the first two phases, three focus groups were organised in the beginning of July 2015. The first focus group focused on National Qualifications. These are presented in Chapter 2. Representatives from the main state and private providers of compulsory schooling, Further and Higher Education, the Employment and Training Corporation and the Directorate for Lifelong Learning within the Ministry for Education and Employment participated in the first focus group. The second focus group targeted the Referencing process and included: representatives of QRIC; the National Statistics Office; and the Employment and Training Corporation.

The third focus group tackled the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning. Participants were from the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, involved in validation and work-based learning, the Employment and Training Corporation, and the NCFHE unit responsible for Further and Higher education. During the focus groups, the main changes in the 4th edition were reviewed as well as the structure of the Chapter in the report for the following three aspects: National Qualifications; Referencing of National Qualifications; and the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning.

Referencing Steering Committee: NCFHE set up a standing steering committee to discuss issues and changes proposed for the 4th edition of the Referencing Report. This steering committee included representatives from: the Members of the NCFHE Board; the Ministry for Education and Employment; the University of Malta (UOM); the state VET providers Malta College of Arts of Science and Technology (MCAST); the state Provider Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS); the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC); and the QRIC section within NCFHE. The steering committee met five times: 18th May 2015; 1st June 2015; 6th July 2015; 13th October 2015, and 10th December 2015.

Members on the Steering Committee Meeting are the following:

- Ms Edel Cassar, Chief Executive Officer, NCFHE
- Prof Alfred Vella, Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs, UOM
- Mr Stephen Cachia, Chief Executive Officer & Principal, MCAST
- Mr Felix Borg, Head, ETC
- Mr Ian Mifsud, Director General for Quality and Standards in Education, MEDE
- Dr Jennifer Casingena Harper, Member, NCFHE Board

- Mr Benny Borg Bonello, Manager, NCFHE
- Dr Stefan Sant, Head, Qualifications Recognition Information Centre, NCFHE
- Mr Pierre Fenech, Executive Director, ITS
- Prof Suzanne Gatt, Researcher

The meetings involved the review of issues emerging from the initial interviews and discussion of the implications of the proposed changes in the Referencing Report to the provision of education and training. This approach provided space for the key stakeholders to be part of the updating process as the 4th edition of Referencing Report was being drawn up.

International Review: The drafted 4th Edition of the Referencing Report also went through the process of international review. Five main international reviewers were involved. These included: Dr Mike Coles, International consultant in Qualifications systems and the UK representative on the EQF AG; Mr John Hart, International Consultant on Education and Training Policy; Mr Vincent McBride, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems; Dr Jim Murray, Director Of Academic Affairs, Institute of Technology Ireland; and Mr Lemalu L. Sanerivi, Secretariat of the Pacific Board for Educational Assessment (SPBEA).

Consultation Conference and Workshops:

During the consultation process of this 4th edition, the first draft document was presented to a wider audience of key stakeholders during a half-day conference held on 29th July 2015. More than fifty people participated in this conference. Another two 3-hour workshops were organised on 22nd September 2015. These workshops focused specifically on work-based learning and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR).

There were 24 participants for the workshop on work-based learning and 32 for the workshop in CEFR. The conference and the workshops were followed by a period of consultation during which stakeholders could provide written feedback.

Besides fulfilling the criteria for the Referencing Report identified by the EQF expert group, the consultation process ensured that the Referencing Report and the accreditation parameters responded to the current education and training scenario in Malta.

1.3 Impact of the MQF and the Referencing Report since 2009

During the consultation process, it was also possible to capture to a degree the impact of the Referencing Report on education and the labour market since the 1st edition was published in 2009. Although the consultation process did not constitute of an extensive impact-assessment exercise, the consultation process has made it possible to establish how the education scenario in Malta has changed as a consequence of the Referencing Report and its implementation. The following influences were identified among the key stakeholders:

Wider recognition of the MQF among the different key stakeholders: It is evident that many people in Malta are now familiar with the Malta Qualifications Framework and the different levels. The main state Further and Higher Education providers all indicate the MQF level of their courses in their prospectus. The MQF Level is also indicated by many private providers. National courses accredited by NCFHE are given an MQF level and many learners are aware of the MQF level of their certification. This shows that the Malta Qualifications Framework has become a tool used within the education and training

sector across Further and Higher Education. It is also used in the labour market by employers during the recruiting process (all the public sector recruitment procedures are based on recognised level rated qualifications) as well as for decisions related to career progression.

Credits are used by a wide range of Education and Training providers:

All courses accredited by NCFHE are assigned a number of credits based on their total learning workload. The University of Malta has fully implemented a credit system based on ECTS for a number of years. MCAST, the main VET provider also uses credits (ECVET for levels 1-4 and ECTS for Level 5 and higher). ITS also uses ECVET credits as the basis for programme design and planning. All courses accredited by NCFHE are included in the national register for accredited courses with identifiable credit points.

Courses accredited by NCFHE and those by the self-accrediting training providers use the learning outcomes approach:

Most of the course descriptions offered in Malta are described in terms of learning outcomes. This is the case for the state VET providers, MCAST and ITS, and the Higher Education provider University of Malta. The licensed private Further and Higher education institutions⁷ whose courses are accredited by NCFHE are also described in terms of learning outcomes. The compulsory education system is gearing up to launch its curricula in terms of learning outcomes. This shows how education and training provision in Malta has experienced a paradigm shift towards learning outcomes.

The public sector specifies the MQF level

of qualifications required for posts: It has now become common practice for the public sector to advertise the MQF level of qualification required for employment purposes. Anyone applying for such positions can either present a national qualification or else a foreign qualification together with a recognition statement issued by QRIC. A list of accredited Italian and British universities is also available for download from the NCFHE website.

The use of QRIC by national and foreign nationals to reference their foreign

qualifications: QRIC has numerous daily requests by both EU and non EU nationals to have their foreign qualifications referenced to the MQF.

National Qualifications follow the parameters set by the Referencing Report:

Self-accrediting state national Further and Higher education providers and licensed training providers obtaining accreditation from NCFHE follow the parameters for VET and Higher education qualifications, as specified in the Malta Qualifications Framework. This has promoted the harmonisation of standards of qualifications in Malta.

Concepts and tools introduced in the first publication of the Referencing Report in 2009 are used widely by education and training providers, employers and learners. The MQF level descriptors, the distribution of credits for different qualifications and the level-rating of qualifications are just a few examples of the significant progress made in the development and referencing of national qualifications.

A number of challenges, however, still remain which need to be further developed in the

enhancement of qualification systems in Malta. These include:

- The need to develop and promote a more modular concept as building blocks for qualifications. Such an approach would support lifelong learners for non-traditional learners.
- The need to develop accreditation and quality assurance parameters for digital/online learning. While the provision of learning through new technologies has improved significantly, the accreditation and the quality assurance processes for these new approaches still need to be developed.
- Achieving better and more widespread permeability of students between general education and vocational streams. Although some important developments have been made, some sectors are left to contend with limited permeability.
- Acceptance and use by employers for recruitment of individuals with Introductory Levels A and B qualifications on the MQF. These new level descriptors focusing on basic skills will only gain ground if they are valued and used for recruitment by employers.
- Developing a quality assurance framework and accreditation process for work-based learning. The National Quality Assurance Framework still needs to be developed further and to better cater for work-based learning to ensure that students have relevant and meaningful learning/ work experiences.
- Better integration of non-formal learning within mainstream formal education routes. Further work still needs to be done to ensure that informal and non-formal learning are recognised by formal education institutions for access purposes and/or exemptions from formal education courses.

1.4 Defining Key Terms Used in this Document

This document builds on a common understanding of a number of key concepts related to qualifications. In order to ensure a clear understanding of the standards and processes outlined and described in the Chapters which follow, these key concepts will be defined at this stage. From this point onwards, the use of these keywords in this document will be understood as defined here under.

The key concepts defined include: Qualification, Award, Credit, Accreditation, Validation, and Recognition. Other concepts which relate to these key concepts are also used in this document. Their definition and their meaning are provided in the glossary at the end of this document. The following are the definitions of key concepts central to this document.

The term **Qualification** in the Referencing Report refers ONLY to substantial programmes which fulfil requirements set in this document in terms of: level of learning outcomes; number of credits and, in the case of vocational qualifications, also in terms of the distribution of credits to key competences, underpinning knowledge and sectoral skills. The parameters for these three aspects which allow courses offered in Malta to be called a 'Qualification' are specified in Chapter 2.

The term **Award** can be used for any accredited course which does not fulfil the entire requirements of a Qualification in terms of number of credits offered. Accredited Awards still need to have level-rated learning outcomes to indicate the level of the Award on the Malta Qualifications Framework. The number of credits of the Award also needs to be specified.

One Credit is considered to be equivalent to a workload of 25 hours of learning. The term workload refers to an estimation of the time an individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments. In line with European tools, credits in general education and Higher education can be called ECTS. Credits in vocational education can be called ECVET. Both ECTS and ECVET in Malta are equivalent to 25 hours of learning. This document refers to credits, with the understanding that these may be called either ECTS or ECVET.

1 credit = 25 hours of learning

(contact hours, practical sessions, mentoring, self-study such as reading, research, seminars, conferences, tutorials, assignments and assessments and related organised activities such as informal and non-formal learning)

Accreditation of programmes or institutions, as defined in Regulation 63 of the Education Act, refers to the formal process of approval by the competent authority that the operation of a Further and Higher education provider or that a programme of Further and Higher education, meets quality standards. This process relies on internal quality assurance and external quality assurance audits.⁸

Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning, as defined in the Subsidiary Legislation 327.432, refers to a process which identifies, assesses and formally certifies the knowledge, skills and competences individuals develop throughout their lives by means of participation in non-formal and informal learning.

Recognition, as defined in Subsidiary legislation 451.02, means a formal acknowledgement by an Awarding Body of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access educational or employment activities. At national level, it also applies to the formal acknowledgement of a national qualification by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE).

The key concepts included in this section are those on which the Malta Qualifications Framework and the Referencing Report are based. While more concepts are used and referred to in the document, their definition is provided in the glossary.

1.5 Conclusion

This Chapter has presented the context within which the 4th edition of the Referencing Report was prepared. It describes the main aims and objectives of the Referencing Report, how it fulfils the 10 criteria established by the EQF expert group, the consultation process implemented in the preparation of the 4th edition, defines the key concepts on which referencing depends, and identifies the main impact that the Referencing Report has had on the provision of education and training in Malta.

The next Chapter describes the Malta Qualifications Framework and the parameters for Qualifications and Awards in Malta. Chapter 3 describes how the Malta Qualifications Framework is referenced to the EQF, QF/EHEA and the TQF, and how this process can be used to reference national qualifications to the National Qualifications Frameworks in Europe and beyond. It also tackles the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning and the principles on which this process is based. At the end of the Referencing Report there is a glossary which defines the meanings of the terms used. The Annexes included contain the level descriptors of the Meta-frameworks to which the MQF is referenced.



National Qualifications

This Chapter describes the national education system in Malta and the Malta Qualifications Framework. It sets the parameters in terms of level descriptors and number of credits for courses leading to a Qualification or to an Award. It also specifies the required distribution of credits in terms of key competences, sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge for VET qualifications. It also describes the principles for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning. At the end of the Chapter, the process of accreditation of Qualifications and Awards by different education and training providers is described.



2.1 The National Education System⁹

This section describes the national education system in Malta. Early childhood education and care in Malta is available for children from the age of three months up to two years and nine months at centres run by both the state and private entities. Children between the ages of two years and nine months and five years attend Kindergarten centres which are operated by the state, Church and Independent Schools.

Compulsory education runs from the ages of 5 to 16 years, and consists of two stages: primary education (from the age of 5 to 11 and

including two cycles - early and junior years) and secondary education (from 11 to 16 years of age). About 60% of students in compulsory education attend state schools, another 30% go to Church Schools while Independent Schools account for around 10% of these students. All secondary schools provide educational courses that are general in nature. However, students can opt to study one vocational subject in the last three years of secondary school. Some specialisation through subject choice in the third year of secondary education exists e.g. taking sciences – Physics, Chemistry and Biology, or Commerce – Accounts and Economics; as well as VET subjects such as, Care, Hospitality and IT. Independent schools represent the private sector of education. The curricula for state, Church and Independent schools have to fulfil the requirements of the National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

Following compulsory education students can either choose to follow an academic or a vocational education path. General education, known as sixth form, is provided by G.F. Abela Junior College within the University of Malta, Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary by the state, and a number of Private institutions. Alternatively, the main VET providers in Malta are the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS).

MCAST is the main state VET provider and includes a Foundation College, a Technical College and a University College. It is an umbrella for 6 institutes: Applied Sciences; Business Management and Commerce; Community Services, Creative Arts, Engineering and Transport, and Information and Communication Technology. MCAST currently offers courses from Level 1 to Level 6 on the MQF. The second state VET provider is the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS), which provides education and training in the tourism and hospitality sector. ITS provides courses from Level 2 to Level 5 on the MQF. There also exist a number of private VET providers offering Further and Higher education and training in a number of sectors such as ICT, care, hospitality, beauty etc. Although varying in size, private VET providers are increasing, catering for 13.1%¹⁰ of VET students and changing the scenario of education provision in Malta.

Tertiary education is provided mainly by the University of Malta. The University of Malta offers tertiary general education programmes ranging from pre-tertiary certificate level to doctoral level (Levels 4-8 on the MQF). Similarly, a number of private education institutions offer tertiary education programmes.

One also finds a number of adult education providers which cater for lifelong learners. These adult education courses enable learners to study at different levels on the MQF. There is a wide range of provision in terms of length of course, Level of course on the MQF, as well as in the mode of delivery of the course.

The University of Malta, the MCAST and the ITS, as well as the Department of Lifelong learning, (DLL) within MEDE also provide lifelong learning courses for adult learners (adult education), either during the day or as evening classes. Courses

cover a wide array of subjects and topics and can lead either to formal qualifications or as a means of personal self-development.

Main Qualifications in Malta

At the end of compulsory schooling, all secondary schools issue qualifications for separate subjects as well as an overall certificate (the Secondary School Certificate and Profile-SSC&P) as a result of formal, non-formal, and informal learning. As from 2014 the SSC&P started being issued at MQF Levels 1-3 depending on the level of learning achieved by students.

Furthermore at the end of compulsory education, most of the students opt to sit for independent national examinations in a number of subjects (usually between 6 to 10 subjects) at Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) Level. These examinations are administered by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board. These qualifications are issued for different subjects separately, and grades range between 1-7, with 1 being the highest grade that can be obtained.

SEC qualifications allow entry into sixth-form, which is post-compulsory general education leading mainly to entry to the more academic route tertiary education. Entry requirements to post-compulsory general education reflect six passes in the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) Examination or, when applicable, their equivalent at Grade 5/C or better. The subjects must include: English language, Maltese, Mathematics, one Science subject and any other two subjects, one of which may be a pass in the BTEC level 2 Extended Certificate (vocational subject). Most providers have similar entry requirements¹¹ and provide access to a two year programme.

The main qualification gained at the end of post-compulsory general education is the Matriculation Certificate, awarded by the MATSEC Board. This certificate provides entry to tertiary studies. The Matriculation Certificate involves two subjects studied at Advanced Level and four subjects at Intermediate Level. The Matriculation Certificate is obtained if students pass all the subjects and satisfy the criteria for the award.¹² Entry requirements for courses at the University of Malta may require a specific subject and grade in addition to the Matriculation Certificate.

The Maltese education system also includes a number of VET qualifications options. These qualifications vary from Level 1 to Level 6 and different programmes leading to different qualification titles. In most cases, it is possible for learners to move from one level to the next up to a Bachelor degree. This is the case of MCAST. At the other main state Vet providers – ITS, students can progress from a VET qualification at Level 5 to a Bachelor Degree at the University of Malta. Examples of such qualifications can be provided from the prospectus of MCAST and ITS.¹³ Apart from state providers, the Maltese education system also boasts a wide range of private education training provides offering a diverse range of programmes. These include short courses as well as full qualifications which are accredited and level rated on the MQF. All courses offered by the private providers are included in a national register of qualifications available publicly on the NCFHE website¹⁴.

At post-compulsory level, students can opt for apprenticeship schemes which are offered at Levels 3 and 4 of the Malta Qualifications Framework. Apprenticeships are offered in many different sectors. They are currently part of vocational education provision offered by MCAST.

The University of Malta, which is the main public University in Malta, provides courses which lead to tertiary qualifications. At Level 5, one finds undergraduate Certificates, Diplomas and Higher Diplomas. Bachelor degrees are offered in a wide range of subject areas and lead to a number of different professions. The University of Malta also offers postgraduate Certificates and Diplomas, Master degrees and Doctorates (both academic and professional). Since Malta is a Bologna Process signatory, the University offers courses as indicated for the first, second and third cycle of higher education.¹⁵

Malta also has a range of provision of adult education courses which are also accredited and level rated on the MQF. These qualifications enable adults to engage in lifelong learning, and possibly also to move up the MQF levels.

2.2 The Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)

A **Qualifications Framework** is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications (at national or sectoral level) according to a set of criteria (e.g. using descriptors) applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes. Consequently, the Malta Qualifications Framework can be considered as the instrument for the development and classification of qualifications in Malta according to criteria using level descriptors applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes.

The regulatory framework for the classification of Qualifications and Awards provided through formal, non-formal and informal learning, and based on the Malta Qualifications Framework level descriptors, is determined by the Subsidiary Legislation 327.431.¹⁶ This legislation specifies the level descriptors for the eight qualification levels (Levels 1-8) and examples of qualifications which exist within the national education and training sector in Malta.

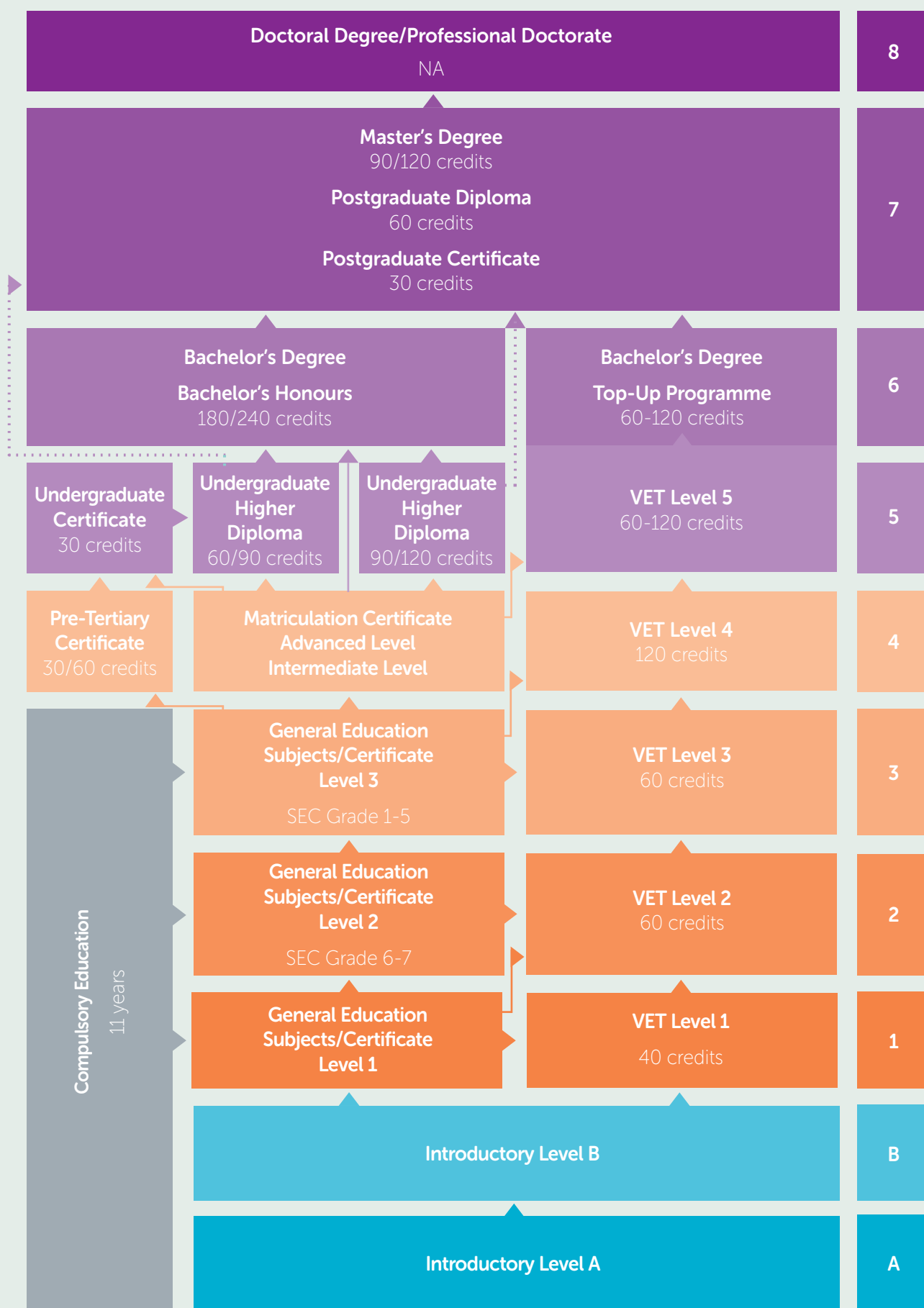


Figure 2: Diagrammatic Representation of the Education system in Malta

The MQF is based on three pillars:

1. **Qualification Levels:** 8 different levels (in addition to the Introductory Levels) are identified.

There is an increase in level of knowledge, skills and competences from one level to another.

These different levels are described in terms of level descriptors specifying knowledge, skills, competences, and learning outcomes.

2. **Qualification Types:** The MQF caters for all types of qualifications in Malta. The MQF presented overleaf includes examples of the main qualifications across all levels and sectors of education in Malta.

3. **Quality Assurance Criteria:** The value of qualifications depends on the quality in the provision of education and training. Quality assurance is that mechanism on which mutual trust and recognition between countries and education and training institutions across Europe is based. National education and training providers conferring national qualifications pegged on the MQF need to fulfil the National Quality Assurance Framework.

The Malta Qualifications Framework remains overall based on 8 levels. The main change in the updated Qualifications Framework is the inclusion of two additional levels below Level 1: Introductory Level A and Introductory Level B. These two levels encompass the learning gained, but not yet rated at Level 1. These two levels have been introduced to recognise any learning that has taken place as well as to serve as a stepping stone towards access to courses and other forms of learning programmes.

The Malta Qualifications Framework includes examples of the main qualifications in Malta. These qualifications cover those achieved as an outcome of compulsory education; within the vocational stream; as well as within Higher Education.

8	Doctoral Degree	
7	Master's Degree Post-graduate Diploma Post-graduate Certificate	
6	Bachelor's Degree	
5	Undergraduate Diploma Undergraduate Certificate	VET Higher Diploma Foundation Degree
4	Matriculation Certificate Advanced Level Intermediate Level	VET Diploma (iv)
3	General Education SEC Grade 1-5	VET Level 3 (iii)
2	General Education Level 2 SEC Grade 6-7	VET Level 2 (ii)
1	General Education Level 1 School Leaving Certificate	VET Level 1 (i)
B	Introductory Level B*	
A	Introductory Level A*	

* These are not yet included in legislation

Annotations

- i. A Full VET Level 1 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as a Full Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSC&P) Level 1.
- ii. A Full VET Level 2 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 4 Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) subjects at Grade 6 and 7.
- iii. A VET Level 3 Qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 6 Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) subjects at Grades 1 to 5.
- iv. A VET Diploma should enjoy the same parity of esteem as the Matriculation Certificate.

Figure 3: The Malta Qualifications Framework ¹⁷

A range of examples of current qualifications which are level rated on the MQF is provided in Figure 4.

8	Doctoral Degree Doctorate of Business Administration Doctorate in Pharmacy	
7	Master of Business Administration Master of Science in Computer Science and Artificial Intelligence Master of Science in Sustainable Infrastructure Postgraduate Diploma in Educational Leadership Postgraduate Certificate in Management	
6	Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Anthropology Bachelor of Arts (Honours) in Spatial Design Bachelor of Engineering (Honours) in Mechanical Engineering Bachelor of Arts in Theology and Human Studies	
5	Higher Diploma in Administration and Management Diploma in Health Science with Environmental Health	Diploma in Public Management MCAST Higher Diploma in Financial Services Higher National Diploma in Events & Leisure Management
4 ¹⁸	Matriculation Certificate Advanced Level Intermediate Level	Foundation Award in Customer Care MCAST Advanced Diploma in Manufacturing Diploma in Rooms Division Operations
3 ¹⁹	General Education SEC Grade 1-5 General Education Level 3	MCAST Diploma in Hairdressing – Women CIBTAC Level 2 Certificate in Nail Treatments Certificate in Travel and Tourism
2	General Education Level 2 SEC Grade 6-7 General Education Level 2	MCAST Foundation Certificate in Mechanical Engineering MCAST Foundation Certificate in Business Foundation in Hospitality & Tourism
1	General Education Level 1	MCAST Introductory Certificate in Animal Husbandry and Horticultural Skills Introduction to Health and Safety at Work Places Award in Personal Beauty Care
B	Introductory Level B*	
A	Introductory Level A*	

Figure 4: Examples/Types of national qualifications level rated on the MQF

2.3 Level Descriptors for the Malta Qualifications Framework

Qualification levels on the Malta Qualifications Framework are specified through the Level Descriptors. These descriptors are stated in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and the consequent learning outcomes achieved. Subsidiary Legislation 327.431 'Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning Regulations' establishes that qualifications forming part of the MQF shall be based on learning outcomes, and as such shall be expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competences corresponding to the respective level descriptors as identified in schedule 2 of the same legislation and reproduced in Figures 5 – 14.

Knowledge involves the understanding of basic, factual and theoretical information and is normally associated with formal learning. Knowledge can be gained through specified learning processes involving contact learning hours with a tutor and other forms of self-study. As one progresses along the learning pathway one can engage in other activities which lead to knowledge acquisition such as: carrying out research and participating in seminars and conferences. However, knowledge can also be obtained in other ways within informal and non-formal settings.

Skills involve the application of the acquired knowledge and understanding in different contexts. A skill may not necessarily be the result of formal learning and knowledge. It can also be learned in other settings, such as work. Skills in such circumstances may be the result of repetitive work in an informal environment.

Competences refer to a person's capability, such as whether one is competent to exercise skills with or without supervision, with or without autonomy and with or without responsibility. For example, at the

end of 100 months of compulsory education one is expected to achieve the basic key competences which are fundamental for pursuing studies at a post-secondary level and for employability in low-skilled basic jobs. The fact that an individual has a successful achievement in these key competences has an impact on the individual's performance, on the overall service at the work place, on one's employability and finally on the national economy.

Learning Outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.²⁰ Learning outcomes are used to express the requirements or standards set by Qualifications. Learning outcomes serve a variety of purposes: to recognise prior learning; to award credit; to ensure quality; to improve credibility; and to increase transparency.²¹ The use of learning outcomes reflects the trends in education across Europe and enables easy comparison to the European Qualifications Framework (as specified in Chapter 3).

The level descriptors for the different qualification levels on the MQF are to be understood in terms of these definitions. This understanding is important for: education and training providers who are responsible for the design and delivery of courses leading to qualifications; employers who need to be able to translate qualifications to what individuals are able to do at the workplace and to learners who need to make informed decisions with respect to their educational investment.

The following tables compare the level descriptors of the MQF and EQF. Both sets of descriptors are stated in terms of knowledge, skills and competences and the learning outcomes achieved. They demonstrate the compatibility of the descriptors, both in terms of their linguistic similarity and the progressive level of difficulty in the learning associated with them.

Introductory Level A		
Level Knowledge	--	Introductory Level A Demonstrate learning development to progress along a continuum that ranges from the participation in experiential situations to the achievement of basic tasks, with varying degrees of support.
Skills	--	Displays the basic skills required to participate in and understand main points of simple discussions/exchanges about familiar topics with another person in a familiar situation, with varying degrees of support.
Competences	--	With appropriate guidance begins to participate in similar and familiar activities.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and understanding; 2. Applying knowledge and understanding; 3. Communication Skills; 4. Judgmental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apply basic knowledge and understanding to carry out a part of a repetitive/rehearsed task, with varying degrees of support; 2. Follow instruction and apply repetitive/rehearsed steps needed to begin simple activities, with varying degrees of support; 3. Respond to the main points of simple discussions/exchanges in a familiar/rehearsed situation, with varying degrees of support; 4. With prompting is able to identify the completion of an assigned task; 5. Applies basic competences to carry out a familiar task, with varying degrees of support; 6. With appropriate guidance shows levels of participation in simple and familiar activities.

Figure 5: Level Descriptors for Introductory Level A

Introductory Level B		
Level Knowledge	--	Introductory Level B <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Use basic knowledge and understanding to carry out simple and familiar tasks, with guidance. 2. Be aware of the steps needed to complete simple and familiar activities.
Skills	--	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Carry out with guidance, simple and routine tasks; 2. Apply rehearsed steps to complete familiar tasks and activities, with varying degrees of support; 3. Use basic tools and materials under supervision; 4. Take into account, with prompting, identified consequences of actions.
Competences	--	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. With appropriate guidance begin to take responsibility for outcomes of similar and familiar activities; 2. Actively participate in similar and familiar activities.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and understanding; 2. Applying knowledge and understanding; 3. Communication Skills; 4. Judgmental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Apply knowledge and understanding to complete a repetitive/rehearsed task, with varying degrees of support; 2. Identify the repetitive/rehearsed steps needed to begin simple activities, with varying degrees of support; 3. Produce and respond to a very limited range of simple communication in familiar/routine contexts; 4. With appropriate guidance is able to evaluate the completion of an assigned task; 5. Apply basic key competences to complete a familiar task, with varying degrees of support; 6. With appropriate guidance begin to take some responsibility for outcome of similar and familiar activities.

Figure 6: Level Descriptors for Introductory Level B

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 1		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 1 EQF</p> <p>Basic general knowledge;</p>	<p>Level 1 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Acquires basic general knowledge related to the immediate environment and expressed through a variety of simple tools and context as an entry point to lifelong learning; 2. Knows and understands the steps needed to complete simple tasks and activities in familiar environments; 3. Is aware and understands basic tasks and instructions; 4. Understands basic textbooks.
Skills	<p>Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has the ability to apply basic knowledge and carry out a limited range of simple tasks; 2. Has basic repetitive communication skills to complete well defined routine tasks and identifies whether actions have been accomplished; 3. Follows instructions and be aware of consequences of basic actions for self and others.
Competences	<p>Work Out or Study under Direct Supervision in a Structured Context.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies basic knowledge and skills to do simple, repetitive and familiar tasks; 2. Participates in and takes basic responsibility for the action of simple tasks; 3. Activities are carried out under guidance and within simple defined timeframes; 4. Acquires and applies basic key competences at this level.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and Understanding; 2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding; 3. Communication Skills; 4. Judgmental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has basic knowledge and understanding of textbooks and simple tasks while relating to the immediate environment; 2. Follows instructions and completes repetitive simple tasks in familiar contexts and under a quality controlled system; 3. Communicates basic information in familiar repetitive contexts; 4. Assesses and ensures that assigned tasks have been completed effectively; 5. Acquires and applies key competences to defined actions. 6. Takes some responsibility for completing simple tasks and exercises limited autonomy.

Figure 7: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 1

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 2		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 2 EQF</p> <p>Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study.</p>	<p>Level 2 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Possess good knowledge of a field of work or study; 2. Is aware and interprets type of information and ideas; 3. Understands facts and procedures in the application of basic tasks and instructions; 4. Selects and uses relevant knowledge to accomplish specific actions for self and others.
Skills	<p>Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has the ability to demonstrate a range of skills by carrying out a range of complex tasks within a specified field of work or study; 2. Communicates basic information; 3. Ensures tasks are carried out effectively.
Competences	<p>Work or study under supervision with some autonomy.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies factual knowledge and practical skills to do some structured tasks; 2. Ensures one acts pro-actively; 3. Carries out activities under limited supervision and with limited responsibility in a quality controlled context; 4. Acquires and applies basic key competences at this level.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and Understanding; 2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding; 3. Communication skills; 4. Judgemental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands and uses good knowledge for tasks, procedures or a field of work or study; 2. Follows instructions and completes a range of well-defined tasks; 3. Communicates basic information in unfamiliar contexts; 4. Selects and uses information for specified tasks and is pro-active; 5. Acquires and applies key competences to a range of actions. 6. Takes responsibility and exercises autonomy in well-defined tasks under a quality controlled system.

Figure 8: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 2

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 3		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 3 EQF</p> <p>Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field of work or study.</p>	<p>Level 3 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands the relevancy of theoretical knowledge and information related to one field of work or study; 2. Assesses, evaluates and interprets facts, establishing basic principles and concepts in a particular field of work or study; 3. Understands facts and procedures in the application of more complex tasks and instructions; 4. Selects and uses relevant knowledge acquired on one's own initiative to accomplish specific actions for self and others.
Skills	<p>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates a range of developed skills to carry out more than one complex task effectively and in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts; 2. Communicates more complex information; 3. Solves basic problems by applying basic methods, tools, materials and information given in a restricted learning environment.
Competences	<p>Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study and adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies knowledge and skills to do some tasks systematically; 2. Adapts own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems by participating pro-actively in structured learning environments; 3. Uses own initiative with established responsibility and autonomy, but is supervised in quality controlled learning environments, normally in a trade environment; 4. Acquires key competences at this level as a basis for lifelong learning.
Learning Outcomes	<p>Knowledge and Understanding;</p> <p>Applying knowledge and Understanding;</p> <p>Communication Skills;</p> <p>Judgmental Skills;</p> <p>Learning Skills;</p> <p>Autonomy and Responsibility.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands theoretical knowledge and information related to complex procedures in a field of work or study; 2. Follows instructions and carries out complex tasks systematically and in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts; 3. Communicates complex information in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts; 4. Assesses, evaluates and interprets facts related to a field of work or study and applies basic problem solving techniques; 5. Acquires and applies key competences as a basis for lifelong learning. 6. Takes agreed responsibility for completing complex tasks, and interacts with the immediate environment and in defined actions at one's own initiative.

Figure 9: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 3

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 4		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 4 EQF</p> <p>Factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study.</p>	<p>Level 4 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands broad theoretical knowledge and analysis of information related to a field of work or study; 2. Understands facts and establishes basic principles in broad contexts within a field of work or study; 3. Applies facts and procedures in broad contexts within a defined field of work or study; 4. Selects and analyses theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a specific field of work or study.
Skills	<p>A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates acquired knowledge and the ability to apply a range of technical or academic skills to carry out multiple complex tasks; 2. Communicates theoretical and technical information in a work or learning environment; 3. Generates solutions to specific problems within a field of work or study.
Competences	<p>Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change. Supervise the routine work of others, take some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies knowledge and skills to perform qualitative and quantitative tasks that require technical capacity normally associated with a technician's competence; 2. Supervises the quality and quantity of work of self and others' under quality assured structures with responsibility and autonomy; 3. Demonstrates an advanced level of key competences at this level as a basis for higher education.
Learning Outcomes	<p>Knowledge and Understanding;</p> <p>Applying Knowledge and Understanding;</p> <p>Communication Skills;</p> <p>Judgmental Skills;</p> <p>Learning Skills;</p> <p>Autonomy and Responsibility.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands and analyses broad theoretical, practical and technical knowledge related to a field of work or study; 2. Follows instructions and carries out defined theoretical, complex and technical tasks; 3. Communicates theoretical and technical information in a work or learning context; 4. Interacts with and generates solutions to problems within the immediate environment of a given field of work or study; 5. Applies key competences to defined actions and to a technical or academic field of work or learning context; 6. Exercises autonomy and takes responsibility for defined qualitative and quantitative tasks of self and others by completing complex tasks in a broad context under quality assured mechanisms.

Figure 10: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 4

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 5		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 5 EQF</p> <p>Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundary of that knowledge.</p>	<p>Level 5 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands knowledge in a field of study that builds upon advanced general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks leading to further studies to complete the first cycle; 2. Develops strategic and creative responses in researching solutions to well defined concrete and abstract problems; 3. Makes judgements based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues.
Skills	<p>A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates transfer of theoretical and practical knowledge, in creating solutions to problems; 2. Conveys ideas, in a well structured and coherent way to peers, supervisors and clients using qualitative and quantitative information; 3. Has the ability to identify and uses data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems; 4. Evaluates own learning and identifies learning needs necessary to undertake further learning.
Competences	<p>Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change.</p> <p>Review and develop performance of self and others.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Manages projects independently that require problem-solving techniques where there are many factors, some of which interact and lead to unpredictable outcomes; 2. Shows creativity in managing projects, manages people and reviews performance of self and others; trains others and develops team performance; 3. Expresses a comprehensive internalized personal world view reflecting engagement of solidarity with others; 4. Has the learning skills to undertake further studies with a degree of autonomy.
Learning Outcomes	<p>Knowledge and Understanding;</p> <p>Applying Knowledge and Understanding;</p> <p>Communication Skills;</p> <p>Judgmental Skills;</p> <p>Learning Skills;</p> <p>Autonomy and Responsibility.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands advanced textbooks which may lead to further academic or vocational learning and researches solutions to abstract problems; 2. Demonstrates operational capacity and management skills using creativity; 3. Interacts with others to convey abstract and concrete solutions to problems in a field of work of study; 4. Formulates practical and theoretical responses to abstract and concrete problems and makes judgements on social and ethical issues; 5. Evaluates own learning and can improve key competences for further learning and promotes team training; 6. Is responsible for the effective and efficient management of projects and people within agreed timeframes.

Figure 11: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 5

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 6		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 6 EQF</p> <p>Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study involving a critical understanding of theories and principles.</p>	<p>Level 6 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands knowledge that builds upon advanced general education and typically includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge at the forefront of their field of study; 2. Uses detailed theoretical and practical knowledge which is at the forefront of a field of study and involves critical understanding of theories and principles; 3. Understands methods and tools in a complex and specialised field of work or study and innovation in terms of methods used; 4. Makes judgements based on relevant social and ethical issues that arise in a field of work or study.
Skills	<p>Advanced skills demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Applies knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to work or study; 2. Communicates ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques involving qualitative and quantitative information; 3. Has the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgements that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; 4. Devises and sustains arguments to solve problems; 5. Consistently evaluates own learning and identifies learning needs.
Competences	<p>Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study context.</p> <p>Take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates administrative design, resource and team management and is responsible for work or study contexts that are unpredictable and require that complex problems are solved; 2. Shows creativity and initiative in developing projects in management processes, manage and train people to develop team performance; 3. Has developed those learning skills that are necessary to continue to undertake further studies with a high degree of autonomy.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and Understanding; 2. Applying Knowledge and Understanding; 3. Communication Skills; 4. Judgmental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Understands professional theoretical and practical knowledge in a specialised field of work or study; 2. Demonstrates innovative theoretical and practical responses to work or study contexts; 3. Communicates ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences using a range of techniques involving qualitative and quantitative information to sustain arguments; 4. Makes professional judgements on social and ethical issues within the area of specialisation, masters problem-solving skills, and evaluates the management of projects and people; 5. Assesses own learning and can specialize in one more key competences for further learning; 6. Is responsible for the management of creative and innovative projects and the team's performance.

Figure 12: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 6

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 7		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 7 EQF</p> <p>Highly specialised and is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study as the basis for original thinking and/or research. Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields</p>	<p>Level 7 MQF</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has comprehensive knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and/or enhances that knowledge typically associated with Bachelor's level; 2. Uses specialised or multi-disciplinary theoretical and practical knowledge some of which is at the forefront of a field of study. This knowledge forms the basis of originality in developing and/or applying ideas.
Skills	<p>Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates specialised or multi-disciplinary knowledge that include reflecting on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of one's knowledge and judgements; 2. Can communicate to specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously reach conclusions which may be the outcome of research, self-study or experience; 3. Performs critical evaluations and analysis with incomplete or limited information to solve problems in new or unfamiliar environments and produces original research; 4. Develops new skills in response to emerging knowledge and techniques and demonstrates leadership skills and innovation in complex and unpredictable work and study contexts.
Competencies	<p>Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex and unpredictable that require new strategic approaches. Take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Creates a research-based diagnosis to problems by integrating knowledge from new or interdisciplinary fields and makes judgements with incomplete or limited information; 6. Manages people and projects and demonstrates the ability to respond to the fast changing business environment; 7. Demonstrates autonomy in the direction of learning and a high level of understanding of learning processes; 8. Has the learning skills to allow continuation to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and Understanding; 2. Applying knowledge and understanding; 3. Communication Skills; 4. Judgmental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has the comprehensive specialised or multi-disciplinary theoretical and practical knowledge which forms the basis of original research, which may contribute to social and ethical issues; 2. Demonstrates capability in using knowledge and skills, to adapt to the fast changing business environment and to manage people and projects efficiently; 3. Communicates with specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously reaches conclusions which may be the outcome of original research, self-study or experience; 4. Performs critical evaluations and analysis with incomplete or limited information to solve problems in new or unfamiliar contexts, and produces original research; 5. Makes assessments of personal continuous professional development, takes initiative to undertake self-directed study and may proceed to further specialisation; 6. Is accountable and responsible for the original research within a personal social responsibility and/or business context for one's operations and for adapting the management of people and projects reflecting the dynamic nature of the environment in which one operates.

Figure 13: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 7

MQF Level Descriptors for Level 8		
Level Knowledge	<p>Level 8 EQF Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields.</p>	<p>Level 8 MQF Has a systematic understanding of a highly specialised field of study which builds upon specialised or multi-disciplinary knowledge and understanding; Extends or redefines existing knowledge and/or professional practice.</p>
Skills	<p>The ability to apply the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation, to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates mastery in skills such as the selection and analysis of research, writing, design, development and sustainability of the argument manifested in innovative scholarly research; 2. Responds to technological, social and cultural issues and addresses the needs of a knowledge-based society; 3. Communicates expertise to a wide audience including peers and the general public using different methods including national and international publications and participates in specialist fora; 4. Demonstrates expertise in critical evaluations and analysis with incomplete or limited information to solve problems in new or unfamiliar environments produces original research.
Competences	<p>Competence at the forefront in work or study including research contexts demonstrating substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly or professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Demonstrates authority in a specialised field of work or study and makes judgements involving a multitude of interacting factors; 2. Promotes social, scientific and ethical advancement through actions; 3. Has a sustained commitment in the development of new ideas.
Learning Outcomes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Knowledge and Understanding; 2. Applying knowledge and understanding; 3. Communication Skills; 4. Judgmental Skills; 5. Learning Skills; 6. Autonomy and Responsibility. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Has theoretical and practical expertise in a specialised field of knowledge which may contribute to social and ethical issues in a national and international dimension; 2. Demonstrates leadership and innovation in mastering research in work and study contexts; 3. Communicates expertise to a wide audience including peers and the general public using different methods, including national and international publications, and participates in specialist fora; 4. Demonstrates expertise in critical evaluations and analysis with incomplete or limited information to solve problems in new or unfamiliar environments, and produces original research; 5. Has a sustained commitment to generate new ideas and innovative projects related to technological, cultural and social development; 6. Is responsible for the leadership of a number of specialised projects and an authority in a specialised field of work or study.

Figure 14: Level Descriptors for MQF Level 8

2.4 Defining 'Qualifications' and 'Awards'

This section will define the use of the terms 'Qualifications' and 'Awards' in Malta with the publication of this Referencing Report. The international definition of a qualification describes:

- a. A **formal qualification**: As the formal outcome (certificate, diploma or title) of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when an Awarding body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards and/or possesses the necessary competence to do a job in a specific area of work. A qualification confers official recognition of the value of learning outcomes in the labour market and in education and training. A qualification can be a legal entitlement to practice a trade (Source - OECD).
- b. **Job requirements**: the knowledge, aptitudes and skills required to perform the specific tasks attached to a particular work position (source - ILO).²²

This definition, and the use of the term 'Qualifications' at National level makes it difficult to gauge the amount of learning that an individual has garnered after following a course of studies. A course which is two academic years long is different from one which lasts four weeks.

They cannot both be considered to lead to qualification at a particular level on the MQF in the same way. This aspect is often overlooked by many learners who, on completing a short course, believe that they have gained a qualification on par with, for example, a National Diploma in VET, a Bachelor's or a Masters degree. There is no national specific criterion which distinguishes between a substantive training course and what is known as a short course.

In order to help employers, learners and training providers to make this distinction, the Referencing Report is introducing the parameters which need to be fulfilled in order for a training course to lead to a recognised 'Qualification' or an 'Award'.

Use of the terms 'Qualification' and 'Award' in Malta

The term **Qualification** in Malta is to be used to refer only to substantial programmes based on learning outcomes at the respective MQF level and having enough workload to meet the requirements depending on the level, as per Table 1. The parameters for which a course offered in Malta can be considered to lead to a Qualification are specified in Chapter 2 where the level descriptors for the different Levels on the MQF and the required minimum number of credits are set for qualifications at different levels.

In order to distinguish between substantial courses which lead to a Qualification, and short courses, all those courses which do not fulfil the requirements in terms of minimum credits required, are to be called '**Awards**'.

This demarcation is being introduced in order to overcome the confusion in understanding the different types of certification that exist. It will be easier for employers, learners and education and training providers to correctly ascertain the knowledge, skills and competences gained as a result of learning in terms of the amount of learning as well as level of learning.

2.4.1 Parameters for Courses to Qualify as 'Qualifications' within the MQF

This section describes the parameters for courses developed and delivered in Malta to be classified as either '**Qualifications**' or '**Awards**' on the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Courses that can be accredited as '**Qualifications**' up to Level 7 need to fulfil the following criteria:

- Learning must be in line with the level descriptor equivalent to the specific qualification level targeted;
- Learning must fulfil the number of credits required; and
- In the case of IVET Qualifications, the number of credits includes the indicated percentage of the course dedicated to key competences, sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge.

It is important that training courses are pitched at the right level of difficulty of learning in terms of knowledge, skills and competences covered and the learning outcomes to be achieved following the learning experience.

Both the state and private sector offer short courses which do not have the necessary number of credits to be called a Qualification. These courses are usually of different duration, and consequently have different credit allocations.

Any course which fulfils the level of learning but not the required number of credits to qualify for the title of 'Qualification' are to be called 'Award'.

The requirements for courses to be considered as '**Awards**' are the following:

1. The learning outcomes need to reflect the level of learning indicated in the specific MQF Level descriptor;

2. The number of credits assigned to the course are either less than those specified for a Qualification at the particular MQF Level, or in the case of VET, do not reflect the required distribution of Key Competences, Sectoral Skills and Underpinning Knowledge.

The title of any short course will thus be the following: **Award in.... (area of study covered).**

It is essential that details are provided about Awards in terms of: course descriptions, duration etc. The learning outcomes achieved, the MQF Level and the number of credits of the Award are to be stated to ensure total transparency. This transparency enables learners to know exactly what learning outcomes are to be achieved and the value assigned to them. This facilitates the understanding of the different types of certification that candidates present during the recruitment process or career advancement.

2.4.2 Assigning Credits to Different Modes of Learning

Credits are assigned to different forms of teaching approaches. The traditional form of teaching - delivered through direct teaching - is today only one form of education provision. Other modes of learning, such as online learning, embedded learning, professional practice and work-based learning are swiftly gaining popularity.. The process of assigning the number of credits to the learning experience has become complex and thus it is vital to respect the established principles and values.

Credits in traditional face-to-face teaching

In the case of traditional teaching, a credit will include an amount of direct contact teaching with the tutor as well as an amount of self-study and other forms of learning.

In Malta, for 1 credit to be assigned to a traditional course, it is to include a minimum of 5 hours of direct contact teaching hours.

It is understood that in the case of credits assigned at lower levels of the MQF, that learners need more direction. Thus the amount of self-study and other forms of independent learning is reduced. This means that in the case of assigning credits at lower levels, the number of contact hours has to be higher than in Higher Education. In less traditional modes of learning, such as distance learning, work placements, practical sessions etc., it is important for course designers to ensure that regardless of the learning process adopted, each credit requires 25 hours of learning.

2.4.3 Number of Credits per Academic Year for the Different MQF level Qualifications

This section specifies the workload in terms of credits within a typical academic year. Qualifications at Levels 2-7 on the MQF are designed on a maximum of 60 credits per academic year where delivery is undertaken on a full-time basis. This amounts to 1500 hours (60 credits x 25 hours of learning per credit) per academic year.

At MQF Level 1, the maximum number of credits per academic year is 40 credits (40 credits x 25 hours of learning per credit) per academic year.

The number of credits per academic year on a full-time basis, assigned at Levels 5-8 falls within the Bologna Process which specifies that the associated workload of a full-time academic year, or its equivalent, is that of 60 credits.

The maximum number of credits of full-time study is 60 credits per academic year.

It is to be highlighted that the concept of credits does not apply to qualifications in general education at Levels 1-3 which are an outcome of provision of compulsory schooling (i.e. in the case of the SEC and the SSC&P qualifications). The concept of credits also does not apply to the Matriculation Certificate at Level 4 of General Education.

2.4.4 Minimum Number of Credits for Qualifications at Different MQF Levels

This section states the number of credits which 'Qualifications' need to fulfil at each MQF level. It also explains the parameters for which short courses are to be considered as 'Awards'. The parameters for qualifications in Higher Education also fulfil the Bologna first (short and long) and second cycle (at Levels 5-7 on the MQF) standards.

The number of credits for VET Qualifications at Levels 1-5 is also specified. The number of credits assigned is 60 for Levels 2 and 3 and 40 credits for a VET Level 1 qualification. It is to be noted that in the case of VET Qualifications, the titles included in Table 1 are generic and VET institutions may assign different titles to qualifications at different levels. However, the parameters for consideration as a Qualification remain unchanged.

MQF Level	Examples of Qualifications	'Qualification' Minimum Credits Required	'Award' Credits Required
Level 8	Doctoral Degree Third Cycle Bologna Process	NA	NA
Level 7	Masters Second Cycle Bologna Process	90-120	Less than 30
	Post-Graduate Diploma	60	
	Post-Graduate Certificate	30	
Level 6	Bachelor ²³ /Bachelor (Hons.) ²⁴ First Cycle Bologna Process	180-240	Less than 180
Level 5	Short Cycle Qualification	120	Less than 60
	Undergraduate Higher Diploma	90	
	Undergraduate Diploma	60	
	Undergraduate Certificate	30	
	VET Level 5 Programme ²⁵	60-120	
Level 4	Pre-Tertiary Certificate	30	Less than 120
	VET Level 4 Programme ²⁶	120	
	MATSEC Certificate	NA	
Level 3	VET Level 3 Programme ²⁷	60	Less than 60
	General and Subject Certificate	NA	
Level 2	VET Level 2 Programme ²⁸	60	Less than 60
	General and Subject Certificate	NA	
Level 1	VET Level 1 Programme ²⁹	40	Less than 40
	General and Subject Certificate	NA	
Introductory Level A	Preparatory Programme	30	Less than 30
Introductory Level B	Pre-entry Basic Skills Course	30	Less than 30

Table 1: Minimum number of credits for 'Qualifications' and parameters for 'Awards'

2.4.5 Distribution of Credit Types for VET Qualifications

This section specifies the distribution of credits of VET qualifications to key competences, sectoral skills, and underpinning knowledge.

Key Competences

VET qualifications at Levels 1-5 on the MQF are to include a number of credits targeting the development of key competences as defined by the European Commission.³⁰ The key competences are considered necessary for personal fulfilment, social cohesion and employability in a knowledge-based society. Eight key competences were identified at European level, and it is essential that qualifications target these key competences alongside sector-specific training. The key competences identified by the European Commission are the following³¹:

1. **Communicating in the mother tongue** is the ability to express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing), and to interact linguistically in an appropriate way in the full range of societal and cultural contexts – education and training, work, home and leisure.
2. **Communicating in foreign languages** shares the main skill dimensions of communication in the mother tongue: it is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret thoughts, feelings and facts in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in an appropriate range of societal contexts – work, home, leisure, education and training – according to one's wants or needs. Communication in foreign languages also calls for skills, such as mediation and intercultural understanding. An individual's level of proficiency will vary between the four dimensions, different

languages and according to their background, environment and needs/interests.

3. Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology

Mathematical competence is the ability to use addition, subtraction, multiplication, division and ratios in mental and written computation to solve a range of problems in everyday situations. The emphasis is on process and activity, as well as knowledge. Mathematical competence involves – to different degrees - the ability and willingness to use mathematical modes of thought (logical and spatial thinking) and presentation (formulas, models, constructs, graphs/charts). Scientific competence refers to the ability and willingness to use the body of knowledge and methodology employed to explain the natural world, in order to identify questions and to draw evidence-based conclusions. Competence in technology is viewed as the application of that knowledge and methodology in response to perceived human wants or needs. Both areas of this competence involve an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and responsibility as an individual citizen.

4. **Digital competence** involves the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology (IST) for work, leisure and communication. It is underpinned by basic skills in ICT: the use of computers to retrieve, assess, store, produce, present and exchange information, and to communicate and participate in collaborative networks via the Internet.

5. **Learning to learn** is the ability to pursue and persist in learning. Individuals should be able to organise their own learning, through effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups.

Competencies also include awareness of one's learning process and needs, identifying available opportunities and the ability to handle obstacles in order to learn successfully. It means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance. Learning to learn engages learners to build on prior learning and life experiences in order to use and apply knowledge and skills in a variety of contexts – at home, at work, in education and training. Motivation and confidence are crucial to an individual's competence.

6. Interpersonal, intercultural and social competences, civic competence cover all forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way socially and professionally, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies, to resolve conflict where necessary. Civic competence equips individuals to fully participate in civic life, based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation.

7. Entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action. It includes creativity, innovation and risk taking, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects in order to achieve objectives. This supports active social participants in their day to day lives, makes employees more aware of the context of their work and, acts as a foundation for more specific skills and knowledge needed by entrepreneurs in establishing social or commercial activity. The business community in Malta believes that this must be given a boost and should be fostered in the early stages of education.

8. Cultural expression refers to the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, performing arts, literature, and the visual arts.

VET Qualifications are to include education and training leading to the development of *sectoral skills* and *underpinning knowledge*. Sectoral skills refer to those skills that are relevant to a particular sector e.g. hospitality, engineering, etc. These sectoral skills are determined by the demands of the labour market. Underpinning knowledge refers to the theory developed within a particular sector. This knowledge provides the theoretical basis on which individuals use sectoral skills at work.

In the case of IVET and CVET 'Qualifications', training courses need to cater for all the three aspects: key competences, sectoral skills, and underpinning knowledge. In the case of Awards in CVET (of few credits), stand-alone Awards can be in any of the three aspects mentioned above. However, they cannot be built into a 'Qualification' simply by collecting credits. There needs to be a coherent development of learning outcomes for Awards to be converted into a 'Qualification'. The 'Qualification' would need to be accepted by NCFHE in order to be accredited (in the case of non-self-accrediting institutions). Details of programme design in line with the breakdown as indicated in Figure 15 need to be presented to NCFHE during the programme accreditation phase.

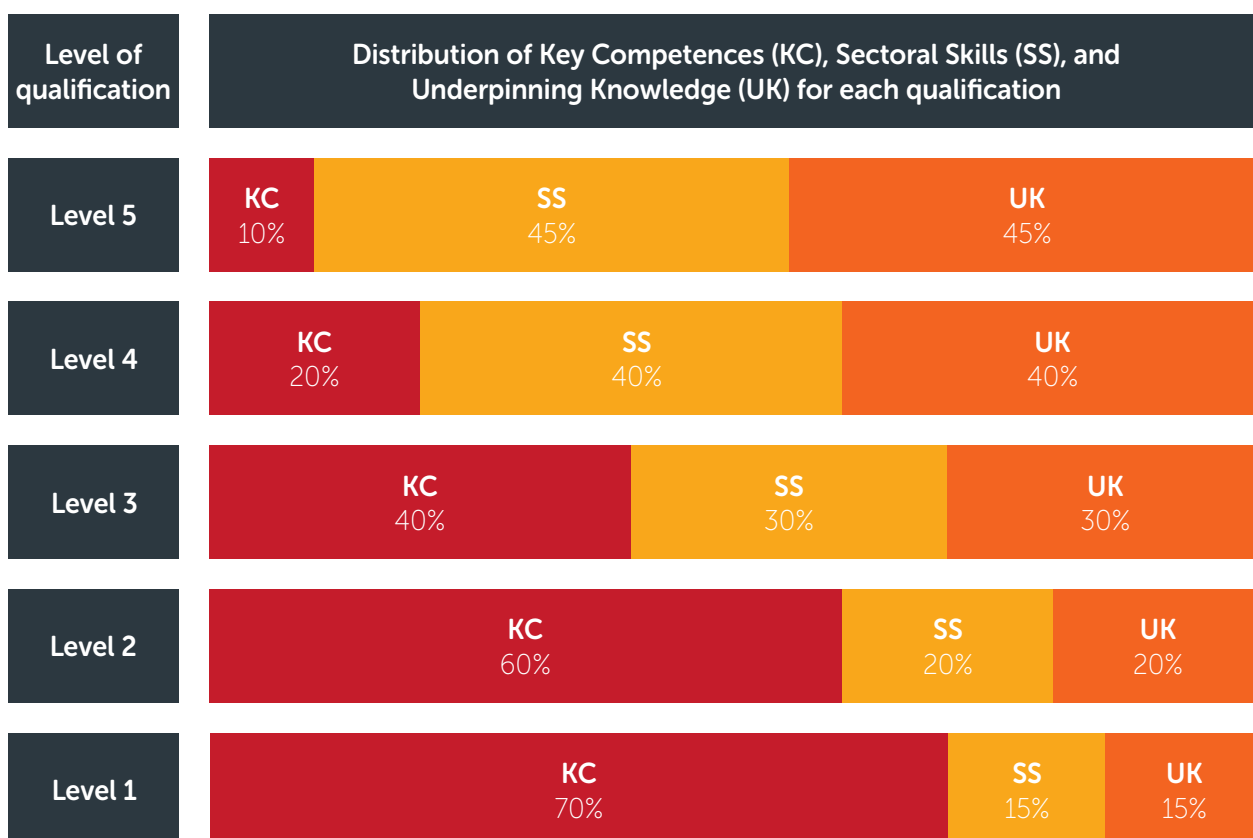


Figure 15: The Distribution of knowledge, skills and competences for IVET and CVET Qualifications

Such details outlining Key Competences, Sectoral Skills and Underpinning Knowledge, are expected to be reflected in the learning outcomes which should be pitched at the respective level of the MQF.

Figure 15 illustrates the percentage of workload established for each MQF VET qualification. This figure applies to IVET and Qualifications only in the case of CVET (i.e. not the Awards).

It is to be noted that the higher the MQF level of the Qualification, the less percentage is dedicated to the key competences. Key competences help learners acquire basic skills in their early stages of Lifelong Learning while simultaneously learning competences in sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge (theory). Percentages are indicative of the distribution of contact and study hours. Although the percentage allocation to sectoral skills and Underpinning Knowledge

is given separately, this does not imply that these two aspects are to be taught separately. The percentage allocation is an indication of the amount of attention within the qualification that is given to each of these two aspects.

The amount of credits allocated to sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge increases with a higher MQF Level. For example, at MQF Level 5, the VET Qualification needs to have 90% of the credits dedicated to sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge, and only 10% to key competences. This is translated into a total of 54 credits out of 60 to sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge. This does not mean that a separate 27 credits are dedicated to sectoral skills and another 27 credits to underpinning knowledge. This rather means that the distribution of learning outcomes dedicated to sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge is overall equivalent to 54 credits with an equal distribution to both aspects.

Therefore, there is no specific need for those designing curricula to label credits as targeting one or the other, but a review of the overall learning outcomes should show a balance in focus. Only 8 credits are dedicated to key competences.

2.4.6 Accreditation of Work-Based Learning

There are many academic and vocational courses which include a component of work-based learning. Work-based learning refers to organised learning that takes place not only in real workplaces, but also in a simulated professional environment whereby work is the predominant context for learning.

There are different types of work-based learning based on the location and conditions of learning which include:

1. Alternance schemes or apprenticeships: where learners spend a significant time training in companies;
2. School-based training which includes on-the-job training in companies;
3. Work-based learning integrated in a school-based programme, through on-site labs, workshops, kitchens, restaurants, junior or practice firms, simulations or real business/industry project assignments³².

There are a number of aspects that need to be adhered to with respect to work-based learning.

- **Work-based learning can only make up a component of a training course:** Any training course leading to a qualification needs to have a significant component of teaching and learning in an educational setting. Work-based learning can only make up a component of that training course.

- **Learning outcomes for work-based learning need to be specified:** Since the work-based learning forms part of an education and training course, then the learning outcomes that are to be achieved need to be specified as in the case of other forms of learning. This means that any work-based learning within an education and training course needs to have the learning outcomes specified.
- **Learning outcomes for work-based learning are to be agreed by the training institution, the employer providing the work-experience, and the student:** It is necessary that the learning outcomes that will be achieved during work experience are identified between the three parties involved. This agreement is to be confirmed through a written contract so that all players are bound to fulfil their obligations according to their role. This means that the employer is bound to provide the work experiences that lead to the development of the learning outcomes identified. The student is to participate actively at work in order to ensure that s/he learns what s/he is meant to learn. The training institution must monitor the work environment experienced by the student and ensure that is conducive to the learning targeted and take any necessary action should any problems arise. The training institution is also responsible for overseeing the assessment process. Students, training-institutions and employers need to sign a Learning Agreement before the start of a work-based learning experience.

- **There needs to be an element of supervision of the student at the workplace:** No student can be allowed to work and perform tasks without an element of supervision. This is considered essential as the student is still developing the skills required to be able to perform a task autonomously. Any student on work-experience needs to be assigned a mentor. The mentor needs to ensure that the student is supported while at work and is not allowed to perform tasks for which s/he is not trained for.. Supervision should also be a process of guidance and support for the student to ensure progress with their learning.
- **The Learning agreement should include the mode of assessment for work-based learning:** It is important that the mode of assessment and the assessment criteria are stated prior to the work-based experience. Training institutions may develop different forms of assessment, but the responsibility and the ownership of the assessment process lies with the training institutions. This means that although employers are asked to carry out assessment, the certifying training institution is still responsible to monitor the process to ensure the quality of assessment.

In assigning credits to work-based learning, the learning outcomes need to be identified and listed. The different nature of work experience given across levels and sectors makes it difficult to develop a simple system for assigning credits to work-based learning. In this case, training providers are expected to consider the learning outcomes to be achieved during work experience and to assign a credit that realistically and generally reflects the equivalence of 25 hours of learning per credit.

2.4.7 Qualifications Awarded Prior to 2007

Legacy awards are qualifications awarded prior to the 1st of July 2007, preceding the establishment

of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

Qualifications awarded before 2007 are valued by the respective authorities to represent a knowledge-base and competences required in today's labour market.

Legacy awards can be of two categories: those within vocational education and training and which fall within the first five levels of the MQF and those that fall within each level of the Malta Qualifications Framework in mainstream education including higher education. The Legacy Awards will continue to be recognised in the same way since the setting up of the Malta Qualifications Framework and as documented in the 3rd edition of the Referencing Report.

2.5 The Process of Accreditation of Qualifications and Awards in Malta

Accreditation in Further and Higher Education in Malta

Qualifications and Awards in Further and Higher Education in Malta are accredited and placed on the MQF in two ways. The process is different for self-accrediting and for non self-accrediting institutions.

In Malta there are self-accrediting education and training institutions as identified by Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. These include the main state Further and Higher Education institutions: the University of Malta (UOM); the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST); and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS). As self-accrediting institutions, they are required to respect the parameters for Qualifications and Awards as set by this document. However, they are exempted from provider and programme accreditation by NCFHE. The programmes of self-accrediting institutions are subject to external quality assurance audits where they are checked for a learning outcomes base distinguishing between knowledge, skills and competences.

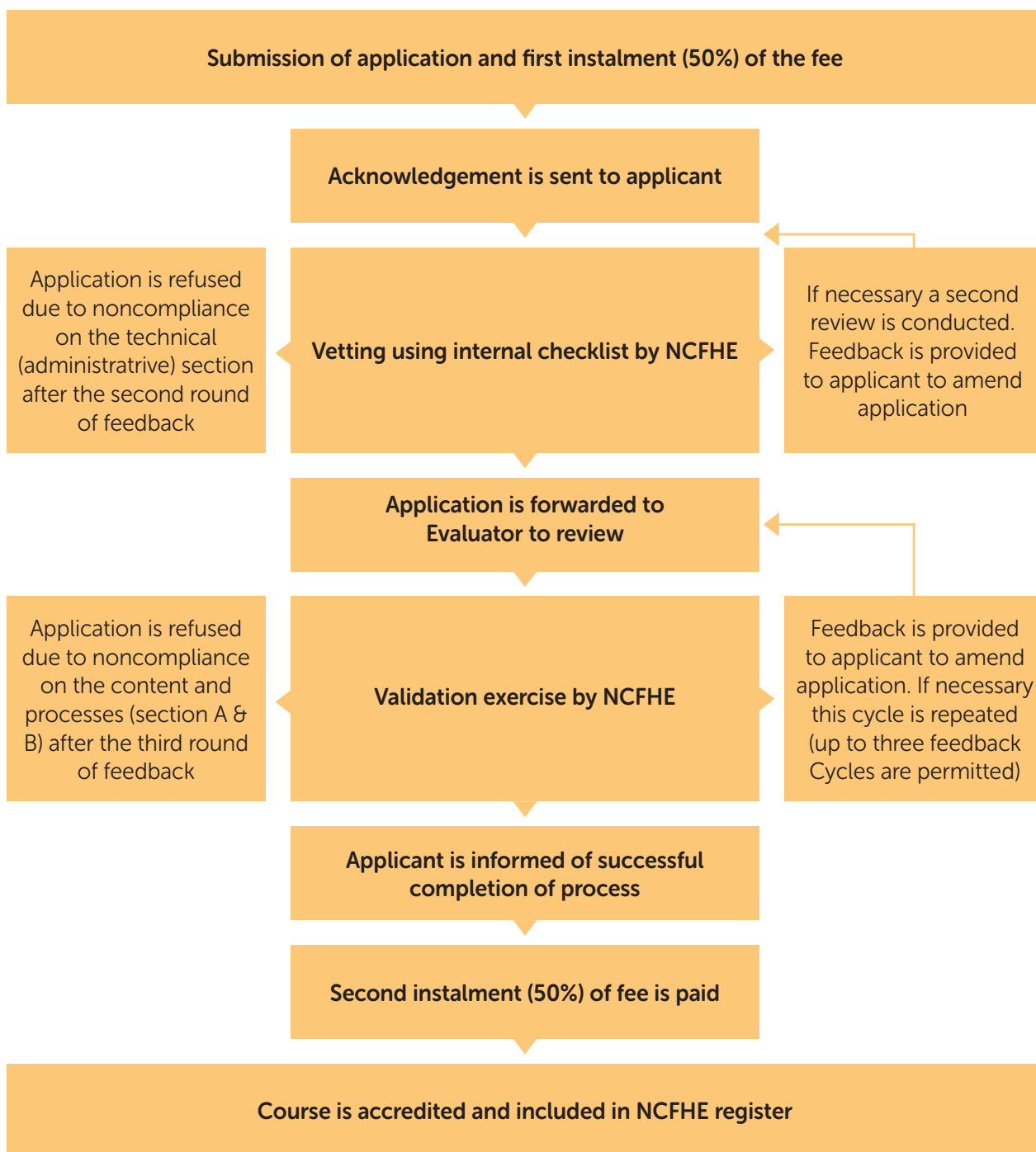


Figure 16: Flow chart depicting programme accreditation process

Other state and Private providers in Further and Higher Education are legally bound to apply to NCFHE for the accreditation of their courses. This process of accreditation is based on the following principles:

- **Adherence to the parameters for Qualifications and Awards as set by the Referencing Report:** NCFHE is responsible to ensure that any accreditation given to courses provided at a national level respect the parameters set within the Referencing Document with respect to both the Level descriptors and the number of credits assigned for the stated learning outcomes. This principle will ensure that the standards set for conferring Qualifications and Awards is respected.
- **Level rating is based on expert opinion:** NCFHE relies on the decision of an expert³³ on: the relevance of the learning outcomes set for the Qualification or Award; the level of difficulty compared to the level descriptors on the MQF; and the number of credits allocated based on the work proposed. This ensures that there is credibility and quality in the Qualifications and Awards accredited in Malta.
- **Assigning of credits according to the learning outcomes established:** In designing Qualifications and Awards, credits need to be assigned to the learning outcomes set. This process involves counting approximately the number of hours of learning and assigning a credit for every 25 hours. In the accreditation process, the external expert considers whether the credits are assigned appropriately to the amount of envisaged work.

- **The role of quality assurance:** The quality of the Qualifications and Awards accredited depends on the quality of the provision of education and training by the Further and Higher Education providers in Malta. In 2015, NCFHE established the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education institutions in Malta. The accreditation of Qualifications and Awards is based on the implementation of this National Quality Assurance framework within the education and training providers obtaining accreditation.
- **Awards of a minimum of 1 credit (i.e. 25 hours of learning) can be accredited:** NCFHE has established that it will accredit courses which amount to a minimum of 1 credit.

These principles are to be respected in the accreditation process implemented by NCFHE. In order to ensure that the process is transparent, it is important that there is an audit trail of the process of accreditation that makes it possible for institutions to obtain feedback and a decision on the outcome within a timely period.

Accreditation in General Education

The accreditation of qualifications within general education in Malta is through two main accrediting bodies: the Matriculation Examinations Board at the University of Malta; and the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry for Education and Employment. The Matriculation Certificate at Level 4 and the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) at levels 2 and 3 are accredited by the Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Examinations Board which was established in 1991 by the Senate and the Council of the University of Malta.

The MATSEC Examination Board's code of practice is regulated by the Maltese Education Act (Chapter 327) and the relevant legal notices that amend this Chapter^{34, 35, 36}. National examinations are run by the MATSEC Examinations Board which take place at end of compulsory schooling and are typically needed for entry into post-secondary and tertiary education.

In addition, the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) has been licensed as an accrediting institution.³⁷ DQSE is able to accredit learning within compulsory schooling at Levels 1-3 of the MQF. The Secondary School Certificate & Profile (SSC&P) from 2014-2015 is a certification of what the student has managed to accomplish by the end of compulsory schooling. The achievement of this SSC&P will depend on formal, non-formal and informal education. DQSE will determine the percentage weighting given to each of these forms of learning and how they contribute to the award of the SSC&P at Levels 1-3. The SSC&P is issued in two ways: for the individual subjects areas which show the MQF Level reached by students for each separate subject; and as one complete qualification where the student would have achieved any MQF Level between Levels 1-3 over a total of 6 subjects (three core subjects and a minimum of other 3 subjects). In the MQF, there is recognition of the parity of esteem between SEC qualifications and SSC&P qualifications.

2.6 The National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher Education

A National Quality Assurance Framework was developed as part of the ESF Project 1.227 'Making Quality Visible'. Through this project, NCFHE implemented its legal obligation to set up a national external quality audit system that complements the internal quality assurance

(IQA) mechanisms of individual Further and Higher education entities. The Framework provides the conceptual context for this work, and promotes the development of a quality culture. The initial scope of the Framework is to implement the provisions on internal quality assurance and periodic external quality audits indicated in Subsidiary Legislation 327.433. The Framework refers to further, higher and adult formal education provision in both state and non-state sectors.

The ESF project has enabled the development of a network of professionals in quality assurance (NET-QAPE). An audit exercise was also carried out in the three main state Further and Higher education institutions. The Framework was launched in a Consultative Conference with stakeholders on the 25th July 2014 that ushered in a three-month consultation period. As a result of the feedback received, the Framework was revised and started being used in October 2014. Through the project, training for national quality assurance auditors was also organised.

The National Quality Assurance Framework provides guidance to educational institutions that embark on the processes of Internal and external quality assurance in order to enhance the learning outcomes provided through their educational programmes.

Quality assurance is defined by Regulation 63 of Chapter 327, the Education Act as one or more processes which safeguards the quality of Further and Higher education within the economic, social and cultural context, on a national, European and international level; ensure the use of appropriate measures as a means of improving the quality of teaching, learning, training and research; and communicate the outcome of such findings within an internal and external framework of accountability.³⁸

Internal Quality Assurance

The aim of internal quality assurance Standards is to provide guidance to educational institutions, covering the areas which are vital for successful quality provision and learning environments in further, higher and adult formal education.

The educational institutions licensed by NCFHE shall adhere to the following standards:

- Entities should have a policy for quality assurance that is made public and forms part of their strategic management;
- Appropriate measures and procedures to guarantee financial probity;
- Self-accrediting entities shall have processes for the design and approval of their programmes; other entities accredited by the NCFHE shall follow the programme accreditation procedure of the Commission;
- Programmes are to be delivered in a way that encourage students in taking an active role in creating the learning process;
- Pre-defined and published regulations covering student admission, progression, recognition and certification, are applied consistently;
- Entities shall ensure the competence of their teaching staff;
- Entities shall have appropriate funding for learning and teaching activities;
- Entities shall make sure they collect, analyse and use relevant information for the effective management of programmes and other activities;
- Entities shall publish clear, accurate, objective, up-to-date and readily accessible information about activities, including courses/programmes;
- Entities are expected to implement the quality cycle by monitoring and periodic

reviewing of programmes to ensure objectives are met and respond to the needs of students and society;

- Entities should undergo cyclical external quality assurance once every five years.

External Quality Assurance

External quality assurance is designed to be conducted in a way which reflects the relevant European and International standards, guidelines and criteria for external quality assurance while respecting international treaties and agreements relevant to Further and Higher education provision as ratified or endorsed by Malta. NCFHE offers its full support to educational institutions in the following ways:

- examines the fitness for purpose and effectiveness of the internal quality assurance processes; and
- examines regulatory compliance of educational institutions.

The licensing of Further and Higher education institutions will be subject to periodic external quality assurance auditing by NCFHE. External quality assurance audits can focus either on programme quality audit or provider quality audit. The implementation of this regulatory framework is important as it gives national qualifications credibility on both a national and international level.

2.7 Enhancing Transparency in Qualifications and Awards

Certification is an important element of national qualifications. In ensuring transparency, it is important that essential information about any Qualification and Award is provided in the certification provided to learners who have completed a course of studies successfully.

In the case of Awards, a degree of harmonisation in the title of these awards is to be introduced.

The title of any Award will thus be the following:

Award in... (area of study covered). It is of paramount importance that – besides the learning outcomes – the MQF Level and the number of ECTS/ECVETS are clearly stated in order to:

- ensure transparency by education and training providers who are clear with respect to what they are offering;
- enable learners to know exactly what learning outcomes they are to achieve and the value given to them; and
- facilitate understanding of the different types of certification that candidates present during the recruitment process or when employees claim additional allowances or promotion.

The structure and format of the Certification issued by national education and training providers for Qualifications and Awards are to follow the guidelines set by NCFHE. It is always important to indicate the MQF level and the number of credits assigned.

In the case of Qualifications, Further and Higher education institutions are encouraged to provide students with a Certificate or Diploma Supplement, following national and international guidelines indicating also the number of credits assigned. Transparency tools such as the Certificate or Diploma Supplements are also one of the aspects taken into consideration during external quality assurance audits together with the widespread use of the MQF and ECTS/ECVET. Where Further & Higher education institutions do not provide learners with a fully-fledged Certificate/Diploma Supplement, the NCFHE makes available a recognition statement (identifying title of qualification, awarding body, MQF/EQF Level and number of learning credits). Such a document presents to users crucial

information to understand the value of the qualification/award in question.

2.8 Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning

The Referencing Report has so far dealt mainly with learning which takes place within the formal education system. Formal education refers to learning which occurs in an organized and structured environment (for example in a school/ training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning in terms of objectives, time or resources. Formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view and typically leads to certification.

Learning, however, takes place in other settings such as at work, through volunteering, helping around in the house, and any other situation where a person learns new knowledge, skills or competences intentionally or unintentionally with no predetermined intention to gain any qualification. Nonetheless, a form of learning to a good degree of depth and complexity would still have taken place. Recognition is important as validating non-formal and informal learning is one way of improving lifelong and life-wide learning.

There first needs to be a common understanding of the key concepts involved: non-formal learning; informal learning; and validation. These terms are hereunder defined and explained.

Informal learning refers to learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Examples of informal learning include: learning to cook and clean while helping at home, learning to play chess at a chess club, making crafts for a hobby, child-rearing as a parent, fixing a car etc.

These examples demonstrate the acquisition of learning outcomes which, although unintentional, are still of value to an individual for further education as well as for employability.

Non-Formal learning is embedded in planned activities but not explicitly designated as learning in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support. Nonetheless, they still involve an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view, but normally does not lead to certification. Examples of non-formal learning include: information talks about specific topics; sports training, participation in Girl Guides and Scouts activities etc.

Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning refers to the process of assessing and recognizing a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example, through education, work and leisure activities outside formal education and are not part of a learning course leading to certification. The validation process thus formally recognises learning taking place outside formal education. For individuals, validation means giving value to all the range of skills and competences one has; for employers it makes it easier to identify what a person is able to do; and for society where all the skills and competences available can be mapped. Validation is used as a common term to cover an entire process involving first the identification of

standards, undergoing assessment and/or testing processes to obtain evidence of the learning outcomes achieved, eventually leading to recognition, certification or accreditation at the end of the process.

There are three dimensions to consider with respect to validation:

1. **Reference to learning outcomes:** Regardless of the way learning takes place, it must be specified through reference to learning outcomes as indicated by the MQF. The advantage of using such an approach is that focus is on what a person knows and/or is able to do as a result of the learning that has taken place rather than the process through which knowledge, skills and attitudes were acquired. The specific learning outcomes identified create the link between the validation process and the respective Level on the MQF. Such a direct link between the learning outcomes used in the validation and the learning outcomes used during the accreditation process safeguard coherence between different learning processes.
2. **Standards against which assessment takes place:** There are various ways through which standards can be established. They can be set by the educational institutions themselves, by accrediting bodies, and even by practitioners within the sector themselves. Irrespective of the way these standards have been determined, Validation involves at one point measuring an individual's capabilities against some standard set of outcomes. Standards act as the yardstick against which individuals are assessed. In the case of validation by NCFHE, this has to take place against occupational standards.

3. **The process of how learning outcomes are validated:** It is not enough to identify learning outcomes and to have standards against which to compare these learning outcomes. The process by which this 'measurement' or assessment is done plays a very important role as it has to ensure that the process is fair and transparent and that every individual receives a deserved judgment of his or her learning. An important aspect of the validation process is guidance provision which supports an individual during the validation process.

The Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning can help individuals and affect their education and employment prospects by: enabling them to gain entry to education and training courses; gaining exemption from parts of a training course; or gaining a qualification related to a specific occupational standard. Malta's legislation, with respect to Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning, refers to the validation of learning with respect to occupational standards related to specific occupations.

The value of non-formal and informal learning was recognised at European level through the European Council in May 2004³⁹ when a set of common European principles for identifying and validating non-formal and informal learning were adopted. These common principles related to the following aspects:

- **Individual entitlements:** which highlights how Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning should be voluntary and that there should be equal access and fair treatment for all individuals wanting to validate their learning. The privacy and rights of the individual are to be respected during the validation process.

- **Obligations of stakeholders:** Stakeholders should establish systems and approaches for the identification and Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning with appropriate quality assurance mechanisms. Stakeholders should also provide guidance, counselling and information about these systems and approaches to individuals.
- **Confidence and trust:** The processes, procedures and criteria for the identification and Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning must be fair, transparent and underpinned by quality assurance mechanisms in order to gain trust from learners, employers, and training institutions that will use certification obtained through validation for education or employment.
- **Credibility and legitimacy:** Systems and approaches for the identification Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning should ensure that there is a balanced participation from the relevant stakeholders. The process of assessment needs to be impartial and without any conflict of interest. Assessors need to be professional and possess the relevant competences. All these aspects will give credibility and legitimacy to the certification obtained through validation.

2.8.1 Legal Framework for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning

The Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning in Malta is regulated by Subsidiary Legislation 327.432 of 2012⁴⁰, which sets the regulatory framework for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning. This legislation indicates NCFHE as the competent authority responsible for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning and for classifying such validation at a level of the Malta

Qualifications Framework. NCFHE will also establish the required structures for the validation process.

Through this legislation, NCFHE is entrusted to:

- introduce a validation system for informal and non-formal learning;
- set up the resources for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning (VINFL) department to function efficiently;
- create a national awareness of the VINFL process and the legislation regulating it;
- convene meetings with key stakeholders on sector skills; and
- develop National Occupational Standards in identified areas.

It is within this legal framework that the principles for the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning in Malta have been established. The degree of validation which is currently taking place is limited to a few sectors. However, NCFHE intends to extend the process to enable validation in more sectors. So far, legislation allows Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning to take place up to Level 5 of the MQF, based on occupational standards developed by representatives of the sector. An assessment is carried out by professional people who verify the evidence of the learning outcomes achieved. In this process, the individual needs to have support and guidance in gathering the evidence of the learning achieved, as well as have the opportunity to appeal should s/he not accept the judgement received following the validation process.

2.8.2 Key Principles for the Process of Validation in Malta

The Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning in Malta is based on three key structures: one which oversees the overall process; one at sector level; and one for guidance and support.

Main Overseeing Structure

At this level, it is important to ensure that there is an overall framework which is functional and caters for validation of the relevant sectors. It is important to also oversee the work that is being done at sectoral level, how the occupational standards are being drawn up and maintained, how the validation process is being implemented and the quality assurance mechanism in place. While at this level, there is no direct contact with applicants wanting to validate their learning or with the validating process itself, it is important to ensure that validation is valued and recognised by employers and education and training institutions themselves in order to ensure and maintain the integrity and value of certification obtained through validation.

Structures at Sectoral Level

Representatives of a particular sector are present at this level. They need to be cognisant of the skills required for all the occupations within each respective sector. The structure at this level has a number of responsibilities:

- **Setting and updating occupational standards:** Stakeholders need to draw up occupational standards, maintain and update them when necessary. The occupational standards involve a detailed description of the knowledge, skills and competences an individual needs to achieve in order to be able to perform an occupation successfully. These learning outcomes are then used to place the certification which can be obtained from the validation process to the MQF. Examples of occupational standards which have been drawn up include those for the printing sector and childcare. For example, a child carer can be validated at MQF Level 4, while a Childcare supervisor can be validated at MQF Level 5.

- Conducting the validation assessment:** The validation assessment is carried out by people from the sector with the necessary experience and knowledge in the field. The current practices involve a combination of assessment criteria but are mainly based on the presentation of a portfolio of experiences and testimonials. There is also an interview with the applicant and possibly a written or practical test as well. The methodology of the validation assessment depends on the sector involved, however, it must always be underpinned by a functioning and effective quality assurance system
- Issuing the certification:** Once the validation assessment has taken place, the assessors decide whether the applicant has satisfied all the required aspects for the purpose of certification. It is, however, to be understood, that this assessment does not operate on a pass/fail system. Applicants who do not qualify for the certification are told what knowledge, skills and competences they still need to learn. Based on this assessment, the applicant can re-sit the validation assessment when s/he thinks that s/he has gained all the required learning outcomes.
- Manage the system of redress:** Any assessment system which considers itself as fair and transparent must always have a system of redress. If an applicant feels that the assessment received was unfair, then there should be the possibility for the assessment to be revised. Such assessment revision needs to be carried out by professionals who were not involved in the initial assessment and do not have any conflict of interest to further increase the credibility of the validation process.

Support and Guidance: A key feature of the validation process is guidance. It is considered important to have a system in place with the responsibility of providing support and guidance to those who wish to validate their non-formal and informal learning. Once an individual has decided to validate his/her own learning and registers for the validation assessment, s/he is assigned a mentor to provide guidance. A mentor must provide help and support to the applicant in identifying and collecting the evidence for the validation assessment. This aspect is considered essential as it enables the applicant to demonstrate whether the learning outcomes have been achieved.

2.8.3 The Validation Process from the Individual's Perspective

The validation process is better understood if it is also presented from the applicant's perspective. This can be represented in the following steps:

- Decision to validate own learning:** An individual may have been doing a job for a particular length of time (the law specifies that applicants need to have a minimum of three years experience within the occupation), however, due to personal circumstances may never have received any formal training related to the work done. With experience, the individual becomes more knowledgeable and skilful, developing many competences. It would be counterproductive for the individual to enrol in a training course as this might not lead to the acquisition of any new learning outcomes. For this reason, the individual decides to voluntarily have his/her learning validated.

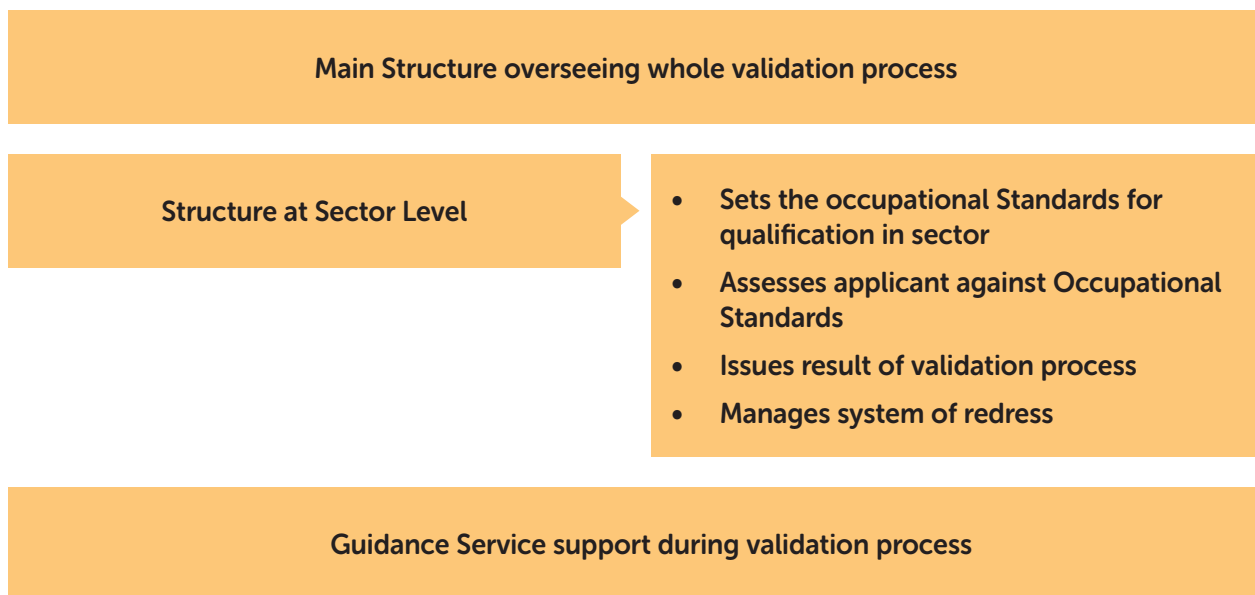


Figure 17: Structure involved in the Validation of Informal and Non-Formal learning

- **Provision of guidance to gather evidence of learning:** Once the individual has applied for validation, the guidance service starts with a mentor being assigned to the applicant. The mentor will analyse the different experiences that the applicant has had and guiding him/her in identifying ways of gathering evidence for this experience to demonstrate the different learning outcomes that have been achieved. The role of the mentor is crucial as applicants will be unaware of the type of evidence they would need to present. The validation assessment will only make sense and really assess an individual's learning if evidence is compiled well and covers as much as possible the learner's experiences.
- **Assessment carried out:** Once all the evidence has been compiled in the form of a portfolio, this is presented to the assessing board where members go through it and make their preliminary assessment. The assessment process will always at some point call on the applicant for further assessment. This additional assessment can take different forms such as: an interview,

a practical examination where applicant is required to perform a task; a written exam to test knowledge; and any other way that the assessing board feels helps to ensure that the required learning outcomes have been achieved.

- **Applicant receives outcome of assessment:** Once the assessment process has been carried out, the applicant receives the results. As has been stated above, this is not a pass/fail situation. If the applicant has satisfied the assessing board, certification will be issued. In the case that not all the learning outcomes have been achieved, the assessment report will identify the weaknesses and lacunae identified to help the applicant invest in further learning and present him/herself for a re-sit.
- **Applicant may contest assessment outcomes:** The applicant may disagree with the assessment outcome. In such situation, the applicant has the option to apply for a revision of the assessment process. If the applicant applies for revision, a new and independent board is set up to review the assessment that had taken place.

2.9 Conclusion

This Chapter has described the national education system, the Malta Qualifications Framework with its descriptors, as well as the parameters for conferring Qualifications and Awards. The accreditation process in Malta has also been described. All Qualifications and Awards in Malta are to follow the parameters set in this document.

The Validation of Informal and Non-Formal Learning has also been described from a lifelong learning perspective.

Referencing the MQF to the EQF and other Meta-Frameworks and NQFs

This Chapter tackles the referencing process of the Malta Qualifications Frameworks to other qualification systems at European Level and, where possible, to other countries in the world. In the current globalised world and the European labour market, qualifications cannot merely have value in Malta. They also need to be recognised in other countries across Europe as well as in other parts of the world. This is necessary to allow learners to further their studies in different countries.. Workers can have their skills and competences acknowledged within a wider geographical labour market. This is only possible if qualifications obtained in Malta are recognised by other countries through the referencing of the MQF.

3.1 Meta-Frameworks

There are different levels of frameworks for qualifications. So far, this document has dealt with the Malta Qualifications Framework which presents the structure of qualifications within the Maltese education system. One finds that there are National Qualifications Frameworks for different countries, as in the case of Denmark, South Africa, Australia etc. as well as meta-

frameworks which cover a geographical area rather than just one country.

A **Meta-Framework** is defined as a means of enabling one framework of qualifications to relate to others and subsequently for one qualification to relate to others that are normally located in another framework.⁴¹

A meta-framework is a classification instrument for levels of qualifications designed to act as a translation device between different national and sectoral qualifications systems. A number of national Qualifications Frameworks would fall within a meta-framework e.g. the European Qualifications Framework includes all the existing National Qualifications Frameworks of countries in Europe and acts as a 'translation tool'. For this purpose, the criteria for levels in a meta-framework are usually written in a highly generalized form and usually cover a number of National Qualification Frameworks in a geographical area or of similar background or interest.

These meta-frameworks enable national qualifications to be compared and their level recognised in different countries. The MQF also forms part of a number of meta-frameworks.

This allows national qualifications to be compared and referenced in a number of countries, not only in Europe, but in a wider geographical spread. The meta-frameworks to which the MQF is referenced are the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF/EHEA); and Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF). The main objective of the Referencing Report is to reference the MQF to the EQF.

3.2 Referencing the MQF to the EQF

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

was developed as a meta-framework to link all the National Qualifications within the European Union. The European Qualifications Framework has emerged from the process of European integration of Higher Education within the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Process which focuses on the harmonisation of VET provision across Europe.

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF) is a translation tool developed to help communication and comparison between qualifications systems across Europe and among the EU Member states. The EQF is based on eight European reference levels which are described in terms of learning outcomes: knowledge, skills and competences. These reference levels and the European Framework allow any national qualifications systems, national Qualifications Frameworks (NQFs) and qualifications in Europe to be referenced to the EQF levels. Learners, graduates, providers and employers can use these levels to understand and compare qualifications awarded in the different EU Member states and their education and training systems.

The EQF was set up in 2006⁴² to promote lifelong learning and worker mobility. The EQF is based on three main principles⁴³:

- **Eight European reference levels** defined in terms of learning outcomes and are able to capture all types and levels of qualifications across Europe.
- **A learning outcomes approach:** The level descriptors are expressed in terms of knowledge, skills and competences, and are not linked to elements of the learning context, such as learning duration or location.
- **Common principles for quality assurance** in higher education and vocational education and training in the context of the EQF.

In the context of the EQF: **knowledge** is described as theoretical and/or factual; **skills** are described as cognitive (involving the use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking), and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments); and **competence** is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy. The level descriptors for the eight EQF levels are provided as an Annex to this document.

Each EU Member state was invited to draw up its Referencing Report which describes the National Qualifications Framework of the country and references it to the European Qualifications Framework. This facilitates the referencing of qualifications across Europe. To date, a large number of EU Member states and other countries in Europe have published their Referencing Report.⁴⁴

The domains of the EQF are knowledge, skills and competences. A key element in all the levels of the MQF is the level of detail which

makes it easier to understand and to level rate Qualifications and Awards. Some particular skills and competences in the MQF feature in every level and their progression can be monitored and distinguished from more general skills and competences which are not consistently found throughout the level descriptors. The Knowledge and Understanding of the MQF includes information about what a learner is supposed to know and understand.

The skills section of the EQF is found to be further developed in the MQF where progression of specific domains for different skills is introduced. These include Applying Knowledge and Understanding, Communication Skills, Judgmental Skills and Learning Skills. Instead of competences, the MQF introduces Autonomy and Responsibility indicating that the competences achieved at every level are accountable and measured in terms of autonomy and responsibility.

Introductory Levels A and B

The Introductory Levels A and B are newly introduced to the MQF. There is no equivalent level on the EQF. Introductory levels A and B are designed to recognise lower levels of learning than that at Level 1. They are intended to recognise all the learning taking place regardless of how basic this might be. The learning outcomes reflect a high degree of supervision and support to ensure that every student is able to earn some form of certification by the end of the project. They have been included as paths for entry into a Level 1 course as well as for employment purposes.

Level 1

Knowledge and understanding in the MQF differs from the knowledge of Level 1 of the EQF. Besides basic general knowledge, the MQF

also includes the possibility of entry into lifelong learning as well as knowledge and understanding about the use of simple tools, basic tasks and instructions, and the steps required for familiar activities. Whereas the EQF equates skills with the carrying out of simple tasks, the MQF distinguishes between the application of skills, communication skills and judgmental skills. The MQF restricts the application of skills to a limited range of abilities, including basic repetitive communication skills that the individual is aware of and the application of consequences to exercise judgement during work or study. The competence domain of the EQF focuses on work or study under direct supervision in a structured context. The MQF includes basic responsibility for simple routine, repetitive tasks and shared responsibility for activities which are carried out under guidance.

Level 2

The EQF defines knowledge at Level 2 as basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study. The MQF considers knowledge in a field of work or study as having intermediate awareness of the facts and procedures required in the application of basic tasks and instructions. Judgmental skills are used in selecting, using and interpreting knowledge related to the specific assigned tasks. The EQF skills are focused on practical skills in a routine environment and use simple rules and tools. The MQF focuses of the skills required for carrying out complex tasks within a specified field. The MQF details the communication of basic information and judgement that an individual uses to ascertain that the task at hand has been carried out effectively. The MQF and the EQF agree that the individual must complete tasks with limited supervision and autonomy at this level. The MQF identifies judgmental value and pro-activity to one's actions through learning skills and key competences required at this level.

Level 3

The EQF and the MQF coalesce on the importance of knowledge and understanding of facts and procedures in a field of work or study. The MQF specifies the element of personal initiative and acknowledges the importance of theoretical knowledge at this level. It also elaborates judgmental skills such as the assessment, evaluation and interpretation of facts, establishing basic principles and concepts in a field of work or study. Both frameworks agree on the range of developed abilities and basic problem-solving skills. The MQF outlines that the individual is capable of demonstrating the range of skills in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts and is capable of communicating more complex information. Both frameworks agree on autonomy and responsibility through personal initiative and quality assured contexts, and assumes that the individual is working in a craftsmanship environment.

Level 4

The EQF and MQF agree on the principle that the learner should possess factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study, but where they differ is that the MQF introduces also the term of broad theoretical knowledge and in broad contexts. It caters for judgement aspects such as the selection and analysis of theoretical knowledge and information. Both frameworks agree on the autonomy and supervision of others associated with this level. The MQF outlines qualitative and quantitative aspects and the fact that the technical capacity is normally associated with a technician's competence. A feature common in all MQF levels is that the individual is expected to have the learning skills which will enable them to proceed to further and learning and at this level to the short cycle of the first cycle of higher education.

Learning Outcomes	Introductory Level A	Introductory Level B	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Knowledge and Understanding	Apply basic knowledge and understanding to carry out a part of a repetitive/rehearsed task, with varying degrees of support;	Apply knowledge and understanding to complete a repetitive/rehearsed task, with varying degrees of support;	Basic knowledge and understanding of textbooks and simple tasks while relating to the immediate environment;	Understands and uses good knowledge for tasks, procedures or a field of work or study;	Understands theoretical knowledge and information related to complex procedures in a field of work or study;	Understands and analyses broad theoretical, practical and technical knowledge related to a field of work or study;	Understands advanced textbooks which may lead to further academic or vocational learning and, researches solutions to abstract problems;	Understands professional theoretical and practical knowledge in a specialised field of work or study;	Has comprehensive, specialised or multi-disciplinary theoretical and practical knowledge which forms the basis of original research, which may contribute to social and ethical issues;	Has theoretical and practical expertise in a specialised field of knowledge which may contribute to social and ethical issues in a national and international dimension;
Applying Knowledge and Understanding	Identify the repetitive/rehearsed steps needed to begin simple activities, with varying degrees of support;	Apply rehearsed steps to complete familiar tasks and activities, with varying degrees of support;	Follows instructions and completes repetitive simple tasks in familiar contexts and under a quality controlled system;	Follows instructions and completes a range of well defined tasks;	Follows instructions and carries out complex tasks systematically and in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts;	Follows instructions and carries out defined theoretical, complex and technical tasks;	Demonstrates operational capacity and management skills using creativity;	Demonstrates innovative theoretical and practical responses to work or study contexts;	Demonstrates mastery of knowledge and skills, adapts to the fast changing business environment and manages people and projects efficiently;	Demonstrates leadership and innovation in mastering research, work and study contexts;
Communication Skills	Responds to the main points of simple discussions/exchanges in a familiar/rehearsed situation, with varying degrees of support;	Produces and responds to a very limited range of simple communication in familiar/routine contexts;	Communicates basic information in familiar repetitive contexts;	Communicates basic information in unfamiliar contexts;	Communicates complex information in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts;	Communicates theoretical and technical information in a work or learning context;	Interacts with others to convey abstract and concrete solutions to problems in a field of work or study;	Communicates ideas, problems, and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences, using a range of techniques involving qualitative and quantitative information to sustain arguments;	Communicates with specialist and non-specialist audiences clearly and unambiguously, reaches conclusions and knowledge which may be the outcome of original research, self-study or experience	Communicates expertise to a wide audience including peers and the general public using different methods including national and international publications, and participates in specialist fora;

	Introductory Level A	Introductory Level B	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Learning Outcomes	With prompting, is able to identify the completion of an assigned task;	With appropriate guidance, is able to evaluate the completion of an assigned task;	Assesses and ensures that assigned tasks have been completed effectively;	Selects and uses information for specified tasks and is proactive;	Assesses, evaluates and interprets facts related to a field of work or study and applies basic problem solving techniques;	Interacts with and generates solutions to problems within the immediate environment of a given field of work or study;	Formulates practical and theoretical responses to abstract and concrete problems and makes Judgements on social and ethical issues;	Makes professional judgements on social and ethical issues within area of specialisation, Masters problem- solving skills, and evaluates the management of projects and people;	Performs critical analysis with incomplete or limited information to solve problems in new or unfamiliar contexts, and to produce original research;	Demonstrates expertise in critical evaluations and analysis with incomplete or limited information to solve problems in new or unfamiliar environments, and to produce original research;
Learning Skills	Applies basic competences to carry out a familiar task, with varying degrees of support;	Applies basic key competences to complete a familiar task, with varying degrees of support;	Acquires and applies key competences to defined actions;	Acquires and applies key competences to a range of actions;	Acquires and applies key competences as a basis for lifelong learning;	Applies key competences to defined actions and to a technical or academic field of work or learning context;	Evaluates own learning and can improve key competences for further learning and promotes team training;	Assesses own learning and can specialize in one or more key competences for further learning;	Makes assessments of personal continuous professional development, takes initiative to undertake self-directed study and may proceed to further specialisation;	Has a sustained commitment to generate new ideas and innovative projects related to technological, cultural and social development;

Learning Outcomes	Introductory Level A	Introductory Level B	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Autonomy and Responsibility	With prompting, is able to identify the completion of an assigned task;	With appropriate guidance, begins to take some responsibility for outcome of similar and familiar activities.	Takes some responsibility for completing simple tasks and exercise limited autonomy;	Takes responsibility and exercises autonomy in well-defined tasks under a quality controlled system;	Takes agreed responsibility for completing complex tasks, and interacts with the immediate environment and in defined actions at one's own initiative;	Exercises autonomy and takes responsibility for defined qualitative and quantitative tasks of self and others by completing complex tasks in a broad context under quality assured mechanisms;	Is responsible for the effective and efficient management of projects and people within agreed timeframes;	Is responsible for the management of creative and innovative projects and the team's performance;	Is accountable and responsible for original research within personal social responsibility and/or business context for one's operations and for adapting the management of people and projects reflecting the dynamic nature of the environment in which one operates;	Is responsible for the leadership of a number of specialised projects and an authority in a specialised field of work or study;

Table 2: Progression within the MQF

Learning Outcomes	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Knowledge	Basic general knowledge;	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study;	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study;	Factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study;	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundary of that knowledge;	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study involving a critical understanding of theories and principles;	Highly specialised; some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study as the basis for original thinking and/or research; Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields;	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields;
Skills	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks;	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools;	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information;	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study;	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems;	Advanced skills demonstrating mastery and innovation required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study;	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields;	The ability to apply the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation and to extend and redefine existing knowledge or professional practice;
Competences	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context;	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy;	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems;	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, take some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities;	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others;	Manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups;	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams;	Competence at the forefront in work or Study, including research contexts demonstrating substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly or professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes;

Table 3: Progression within the EQF

Level 5

Knowledge at MQF Level 5 is expected to be based on advanced general secondary education at post-secondary level which matches the recommendation of the EQF - comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical. The MQF details researching solutions and problem-solving skills. At MQF Level 5, the individual is expected to make judgements on knowledge of relevant and social issues. Both frameworks agree on the demonstration of a range of skills which lead to creative solutions to problems. The learner demonstrates communication skills by conveying structured and coherent ideas to peers, supervisors and clients using judgmental skills and communicates information which is both quantitative and qualitative. The learning skills statement shows that by MQF Level 5, the learner should be ready to proceed to higher education. The competences in both frameworks focus on management supervision and development of team players in an environment underpinned by unpredictable change. The MQF applies the term "some autonomy" to further studies to higher education.

Level 6

There is a consensus among the EQF and the MQF that this level is characterised by an advanced level of knowledge and skills, particularly judgmental skills. There are some aspects which the MQF adopted from the EQF. The EQF and the MQF agree on the production of innovative work. The EQF does not elaborate on skills such as the gathering and interpreting of information and the communication of ideas, problems and solutions based on sustained and well-researched arguments, but includes critical understanding and the demonstration of mastery and innovation in solving complex and unpredictable problems. The EQF's

judgmental skills are more problem-oriented and the MQF's are more research-oriented. Both the EQF and MQF take into consideration the management of people and projects. The two distinct features that are not found in the EQF are linked to personal competences, such as when an individual makes judgements on social and ethical issues and using one's initiative. The MQF is more detailed than the EQF because it is a national framework and therefore does not have to be as general or as comprehensive as the EQF.

Level 7

The EQF emphasises the importance of original research as well as the review of personal development at Level 7. The MQF considers knowledge at this level to be of a specialised or a multi-disciplinary nature. However, this is not the case in the EQF, which concentrates on a specialised type of knowledge. This merely implies that the MQF gives a more detailed description of the skills required at this level. It is also worth noting that while critical evaluation is found in Level 7 of the MQF, it is found at Level 8 of the EQF. While communication is excluded from all levels of the EQF, the MQF gives a more elaborate description of how communicated information is a result of research, self-study and experience that can be directly linked to the recognition of informal and non-formal learning.

Level 8

The two frameworks agree that at this level the individual should have reached a high level of expertise in a specialised area of study or profession. They give the same importance to the mastering of critical assessment and evaluation related to research in a specialised field of study. The individual has a certain authority in the field which has to be sustained by continuous professional development.

All frameworks agree that at this level one has a personal social responsibility to promote technological, social and economic development through researching, testing and communicating innovative ideas. The MQF includes a statement about communicating the expertise to scholars and the general public through publication and participation in specialist forums. The MQF also includes managerial aspects in terms of responsibility for the leadership of specialised projects, in areas not merely restricted to specialist fields. Unlike the managerial role associated with the previous level, at Level 8 the individual is responsible for projects which are specialised, thus using the expertise acquired in the field of specialisation.

The EQF and MQF Levels

Figure 18 provides the resulting referencing of the MQF to the EQF. A comparative exercise of the two frameworks presented leads to the conclusion that the qualification levels on the EQF are equivalent to the levels of the MQF. The main difference is mainly with respect to the Introductory Levels A and B. In the case of these levels, it was not possible to reference these to a specific level on the MQF. Figure 18 shows the relationship between the MQF and the EQF.

Introductory Levels A and B are placed at a lower level than Level 0. These two levels have not been referenced since the EQF does not assess basic skills. These other Levels on the MQF reflect the educational level for students who would have otherwise finished compulsory schooling.

MQF Levels	EQF Levels
8	8
7	7
6	6
5	5
4	4
3	3
2	2
1	1
Introductory Level A	
Introductory Level B	

Figure 18: Referencing of the MQF to the EQF

3.3 Referencing the MQF to other Meta-frameworks

The MQF is also referenced to two other frameworks:

- The Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area (QF/EHEA):** As a Bologna signatory, Malta follows the Bologna Process in Higher Education. The Malta Qualifications Framework is also referenced to the QF/EHEA, the meta-framework for Higher education developed for Bologna signatories, which allows Higher Education qualifications from Malta to be referenced to those of other countries who are also Bologna signatories and have implemented the first, second and third cycle of the Bologna Process.

- **The Transnational Qualifications Framework (TQF):** This meta-framework was developed for the Virtual University for Small states of the Commonwealth (VUSSC). The VUSSC TQF encompasses thirty-one member states: from Africa, Asia, Caribbean, Europe, and the Pacific regions and of which Malta is a member. The TQF is a transnational Qualifications Framework in the truest sense of the word and comprises of both national and regional frameworks⁴⁵.

Referencing the MQF to these meta-frameworks will enable qualifications conferred in Malta to be recognised in a large number of countries across the world. The following section will describe in more in-depth detail, the structure and qualification levels for each of these meta-frameworks.

3.3.1 The Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area

In 1999, 29 European Ministers responsible for Higher Education met in Bologna and signed the Bologna Declaration⁴⁶ which lay the basis for establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. This process has led to developments within Higher Education, such as the development and implementation of the use of the European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS)⁴⁷, the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance; and the 3-cycle model for Higher Education, which subsequently led to the development of the Qualifications Framework for the European Higher Education Area.

Malta was among the foundation signatories of the Bologna declaration in 1999 and has since contributed to the discussion within the Bologna Process, as well as implemented changes in the national Higher Education provision to reflect these developments. The many changes to the first and second cycle courses (Bachelor and Master) at the University of Malta were the result of implementing the Bologna Process in Malta.

The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) Framework was adopted in Bergen in 2005.⁴⁸ The QF/EHEA, comprises of three cycles (including, within national contexts, the possibility of intermediate qualifications), generic descriptors for each cycle based on learning outcomes and competences, and credit ranges in the First and Second cycles. The learning outcomes for the First, Second and the Third cycle are known as the Dublin Descriptors. The number of ECTS for the First and Second cycle was also determined. Table 4 shows the qualification titles and credits for each of the three cycles.

Level of Cycle	Main Qualification	Range of Credits
Short Cycle	Foundation Degree	Typically includes 120 ECTS credits
First Cycle	Bachelor	Typically include 180- 240 ECTS credits
Second Cycle	Masters	Typically include 90- 120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle
Third Cycle	Doctorate	Not Specified

Table 4: Level of Cycle, Main Qualification and Range of Credits for the QF/EHEA

The level descriptors for the three cycles distinguish between the different levels of learning outcomes at the three levels. Distinguishing features for each level include:

- Short Cycle:** The first level of Higher Education builds on general education and creates a stepping stone to the first cycle qualifications. Graduates are able to draw upon advanced knowledge and are also able to use information gathered to address both concrete and abstract problems
- First Cycle:** Graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding at a professional level and the qualification often allows the practice of a profession due to gaining of knowledge and understanding in a field of studies. They have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study.
- Second Cycle:** Founded on the first cycle qualifications, graduates are provided with a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context. Graduates can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem-solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study to formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information.
- Third Cycle:** Graduates have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity and have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge. They can promote, within an academic, professional, technological, social or cultural context, advancement in a knowledge based society.

Learning	Level 5 Short cycle	Level 6 1 st Cycle	Level 7 2 nd Cycle	Level 8 3 rd Cycle
Knowledge and Understanding	[is] able to source and understand advanced knowledge through textbooks	[is] supported by advanced text books [with] some aspects informed by knowledge at the forefront of their field of study	provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing or applying ideas often in a research context	[includes] a systematic understanding of their field of study and mastery of the methods of research associated with that field
Applying Knowledge and Understanding	[through] application of advanced knowledge to abstract problems using creativity of the operational skills	[through] devising and sustaining arguments	through problem- solving abilities [applied] in new unfamiliar environments within broader [or multidisciplinary] context	[is demonstrated by the] ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt substantial process of research with scholarly integrity. [is in the context of] a contribution that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work some of which merits national or international referenced publication
Communication	Conveys such solutions in an abstract but concrete manner	[of] information, ideas, problems and solutions	[of] their conclusions and the underpinning knowledge and rationale (restricted scope) to specialist and non-specialist audiences (monologue)	with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general (dialogue) about their areas of expertise (broad scope)
Learning Skills	Able to judge own understanding and seek learning from others	have developed those skills needed to study further with a high level of autonomy	study in a manner that may be largely self directed or autonomous	expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement

Table 5: Progression within the QF/EHEA

The descriptors and the QF/EHEA framework are provided as an Annex in this document. The QF/EHEA is relevant to Levels 5-8 on the MQF.

Level 5

The fifth level of the QF/EHEA and the MQF demonstrates knowledge and understanding in a specific field of study that builds upon general secondary education. Students are expected to be independent learners through the use of advanced textbooks. Knowledge at this level provides an underpinning for a field of work or study, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle. Students can apply their knowledge and understanding

in occupational contexts and have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems. They can communicate about their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients, as well as have the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.

Level 6

The QF/EHEA and the MQF at this level are characterised by an advanced level of knowledge and skills. The QF/EHEA and the MQF include skills such as the gathering and interpreting of information and the communication of ideas, problems and solutions, based on sustained and well-researched arguments. Judgmental skills in the QF/EHEA and the MQF are more research-oriented. The QF/ EHEA includes autonomy and responsibility which is not the case in the MQF, as it takes into consideration the management of people and projects. The MQF, like the QF/EHEA, expects the learner to demonstrate learning skills with a high level of autonomy. The two distinct features that are not found in the QF/EHEA are linked to personal competences, such as when an individual makes judgements on social and ethical issues, and when the learner is competent enough to use own initiative.

Although the QF/EHEA includes the communication of ideas, problems and solutions, it does not elaborate about the methodology of delivery in the same way the MQF does. The MQF is more detailed than the QF/EHEA because it is a national framework and therefore does not have to be as general and flexible.

Level 7

The QF/EHEA emphasises the importance of original research at Level 7. These also concur on the review of personal development. The MQF and the QF/EHEA consider knowledge at this level to be of a specialised or a multi-disciplinary nature. The frameworks, however, diverge on communicated information, which the MQF, unlike the QF/EHEA, regards as being the outcome of research, self-study or experience.

MQF Levels	QF/EHEA Levels
8	3 rd cycle
7	2 nd cycle
6	1 st cycle
5	Short cycle
4	
3	
2	
1	
Introductory Level A	
Introductory Level B	

Figure 19: The MQF and the QF/EHEA

Level 8

The individual at this level is similar to the Level 8 on the EQF. The QF/EHEA and the MQF, include an additional statement about communicating expertise to scholars and the general public through publication and participation in specialised forums..

As is indicated in Figure 19, the three cycles of the QF/EHEA are referenced to Levels 5, 6, 7 and 8 on the MQF. Short cycle tertiary education qualifications fall at level 5 of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

3.3.2 Referencing the MQF to the Transnational Qualifications Framework

The Transnational Qualifications Framework for Small states of the Commonwealth (TQF) was developed to analyse and find commonalities between existing Qualifications Frameworks among small states of the Commonwealth. Common to all states is their size: the member

states each have a population that does not exceed two million citizens. Malta is one of the participants in this initiative. Ministers of Education of 31 small countries in the Commonwealth agreed to set up the Virtual University for Small states of the Commonwealth (VUSSC).

The VUSCC is not a tertiary institution but a world-spanning collaborative network for strengthening and developing the existing institutions in small states of the Commonwealth.

The TQF is defined as:

A translation instrument for the classification of VUSSC qualifications according to set criteria for specified levels of learning achieved to improve credit transfer and promote common accreditation mechanisms between participating VUSSC countries.⁴⁹

The TQF is thus a Trans-National Qualifications Framework which aims to harmonise Qualifications Frameworks within the VUSSC. It serves as a mechanism to support the

accreditation of qualifications and transfer of credits between countries thereby improving the socio-economic status of the member states. The TQF is available to 31 member states of the Commonwealth which represents millions of students.

The TQF is defined in terms of learning outcomes and has 10 levels; seven of which are situated at undergraduate level and three of which are at postgraduate level. Qualifications are thus referenced at 10 different levels. Levels 8 and 9 of the TQF have the same level of difficulty as Level 7 of the EQF and the MQF which corresponds to the Second Cycle of the Bologna Process. The First Bologna Cycle, Level 6 of the EQF, MQF, is comparable to Level 7 of the TQF. Level 6 of the TQF corresponds to the Short Cycle of the Bologna Process and to Level 5 of the EQF and MQF. The TQF's Level 5 has the same value as Level 4 of the MQF and the TQF's Level 4 carries the comparable learning outcomes as Level 3 of the MQF. The first two Levels of the TQF differ when compared to the eight-level framework. The TQF Levels 2 and 3 have the same value as MQF Level 2. Similarly

Level	Qualification Title	Minimum credits	Hours of TQF	MQF Level
10	Doctoral Degree	360	3600	8
9	Masters Degree	240	2400	7
8	Post-graduate Certificate and Diploma Bachelor's Degree with Honours	120	1200	
7	Bachelor's Degree Graduate Certificate and Diploma	360	3600	6
6	Advanced/Higher Diploma Associate Degree/Foundation Degree	240	2400	5
5	Diploma	240	2400	4
4	Advanced Certificate	120	1200	3
3	Certificate III	40	400	2
2	Certificate II	40	400	
1	Certificate I	40	400	1

Table 6: Architecture of the TQF⁵⁰ referenced to the MQF

Level 1 of the MQF is comparable to Level 1 of the TQF. The TQF has no comparable Levels to the Introductory Levels A and B. The architecture for these qualifications is given in Table 6.

The level descriptors provided are not the ceiling for each level but act as indicators of the complexity of the type of learning being experienced. The examples of qualifications given are only examples of qualifications that may exist at those levels within the partner countries. The TQF also uses a system of credits. All qualifications should consist of modules that are registered separately on the TQF. In the TQF system, one credit is considered as 10 notional hours of learning at the appropriate level. Modules are translated onto the TQF through the level descriptors at a particular level as are specified on the TQF guidelines.⁵¹ The level descriptors for the TQF are provided in the Annex. The most recent TQF guidelines were published in a document by the Commonwealth of Learning in 2015.⁵²

3.4 The Process of Referencing the MQF to the Meta-Frameworks

The main purpose of the Referencing Report is to reference the MQF to the EQF. When the EQF was established, the European Commission called upon Member states to relate their national qualifications systems to the European Qualifications Framework, in particular by referencing, in a transparent manner, National Qualifications Frameworks in accordance with national legislation and practice.⁵³

Since Malta is also a Bologna signatory and a member of the Virtual University for Small states of the Commonwealth, national qualifications also fall within the meta-frameworks: QF/EHEA; and the TQF. Figure 20 shows how the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), the body legally entrusted with the

responsibility of maintaining and updating the Malta Qualifications Framework, references the MQF to these three meta-frameworks.

MQF Levels	EQF Levels	QF/EHEA Levels	TQF Levels
8	8	3 rd cycle	10
7	7	2 nd cycle	9
6	6		8
5	5	1 st cycle	7
4	4	Short cycle	6
3	3		5
2	2		4
1	1		3
			2
			1
Introductory Level A			
Introductory Level B			

Figure 20: Referencing of the MQF to the EQF, QF/EHEA and the TQF

In order to map the level of a national qualification to one of these meta-frameworks, this figure needs to be used as a reference. The process for referencing the MQF to any of these three meta-frameworks is indicated below:

The qualification is level-rated by NCFHE

on the MQF: The Referencing Report will help entities in Malta and other countries not familiar with Malta's education system to understand the Malta Qualifications Framework and the type of Qualifications and Awards that exist in Malta. In the case of a particular Qualification and/or Award, through the Referencing Report, the MQF of the Qualification and/or Award in question can be identified.

The Referencing Report (i.e. this report) is then used to reference the level of the qualification on the MQF to the level on the meta-framework:

Figure 20 is to be used to carry out this Referencing process. It is assumed that in this process, the Referencing Report is the official legal tool to guide the referencing process and that its content and the guidelines are to be respected.

The process of referencing the MQF to these meta-frameworks enables national qualifications to have value and be recognised within a wider geographical area. The process will increase opportunities for further studies and employment at international level to individuals possessing national qualifications.

3.5 The Process of Referencing the MQF to other Qualification Frameworks

Meta-Frameworks serve as umbrella frameworks for different systems in different countries. When an individual opts to go and study or work abroad, it is necessary for qualifications from Malta to be recognised in other countries. It is thus essential for NARIC centres to reference national qualifications from the MQF to the national Qualifications Frameworks of other countries.

As members of the European Union, it is important that other member states are able to reference our national qualifications to their own national Qualifications Framework and vice versa. This will facilitate the mobility of workers across Europe as it is easier to recognise the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals possess. It will also support lifelong learning in a European context where European citizens are able to further their studies across Europe as a result of easy translation and comparability of qualifications obtained in the different European countries.

The EQF is the meta-framework which allows the referencing of national qualifications to qualification frameworks across the European Union, within individual EU Member states which have published their Referencing Report. When the EQF was established in 2008, EU Member states were asked to reference their existing Qualifications Framework to the EQF. Those Member states which did not have a Qualifications Framework were invited to develop their own framework and to reference it to the EQF. The tool through which the individual EU Member states reference their Qualifications Framework to the EQF is the Referencing Report. This is the main objective of this report with respect to Malta.

The process with which national qualifications on the MQF can be referenced to other EU Member states' Qualifications Frameworks involves the following steps:

1. identify the MQF level of the national qualification;
2. reference the qualification level on the MQF to that on the EQF;
3. use the Referencing Report of the country in question to identify how they reference their qualification levels on their national Qualifications Framework to the EQF;
4. identify the matching qualification level on the Qualifications Framework of the country with that of the MQF.

The steps involved in this process are shown in Figure 21, using the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF), the Danish Qualifications Framework (DGF) and the Irish National Qualifications Framework (INFQ) as examples.

Taking a Masters course at the University of Malta as an example, this is known to be a Level 7 qualification on the MQF and EQF. Since Ireland, Denmark and Scotland have referenced their own qualifications to the EQF, their Referencing Report can be used to reference the Masters from Malta to a Level 11 in Scotland, a Level 7 in Denmark, and a Level 9 in Ireland. It is to be kept in mind, however, that this does not necessarily mean that the Masters from Malta is the equivalent to a Masters in Ireland, Scotland or Denmark.

In the case of Introductory Levels A and B of the MQF and Levels 1 and 2 of the SCQF, these two levels are considered as comparable. When one looks at the level descriptors, the SCQF describes Level 1 as the recognition of learning and achievement that ranges from participation in experiential situations to the achievement of basic tasks with varying degrees of support. Introductory Level A is described in more detail in the MQF, but similarly also refers to progress along a continuum that ranges from the participation in experiential situations to the achievement of basic tasks, with varying degrees of support. It is to be noted that the term 'comparable' and not 'referenced' is used as the EQF does not provide the possibility for referencing at this Level due to the absence of any levels below Level 1 in the EQF.

The referencing process only provides a reference to the level-rating. One then needs to look into the learning programmes or similar courses in these countries, and understand how they are designed in terms of credits, structure, content etc. The process is not a simple and straight forward one, as referencing only provides the level of learning in terms of general knowledge, skills and learning outcomes. However, it provides a strong basis

on which different countries can understand each others' qualifications. It builds mutual trust between systems and makes the recognition of international qualifications possible.

The process of referencing the MQF to other countries outside Europe who have referenced their qualifications to the QF/EHEA and the TQF is identical. This process is possible as long as a country has a national Qualifications Framework referenced to any of the three meta-frameworks: EQF, QF/EHEA, and the TQF.

3.6 Referencing beyond EQF, QF/EHEA and TQF

NCFHE is the competent authority to recognise and accredit qualifications against the Malta Qualifications Framework. It deals with the recognition and comparability of both academic and vocational qualifications through the Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (QRIC). QRIC uses the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for Life Long learning to provide recognition and pegging advice on both national and international qualifications. QRIC also forms part of the ENIC-NARIC Network.

While the main purpose of this report is to reference the MQF to the EQF, some attention must still be given to the referencing of national qualifications in countries outside the three meta-frameworks: EQF, QF/EHEA; and the TQF. Prior to the establishment of the EQF, there was, and is still in place, the Lisbon Recognition Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region. The Convention was developed by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, and adopted by national representatives in Lisbon in 1997. Most European countries have since ratified

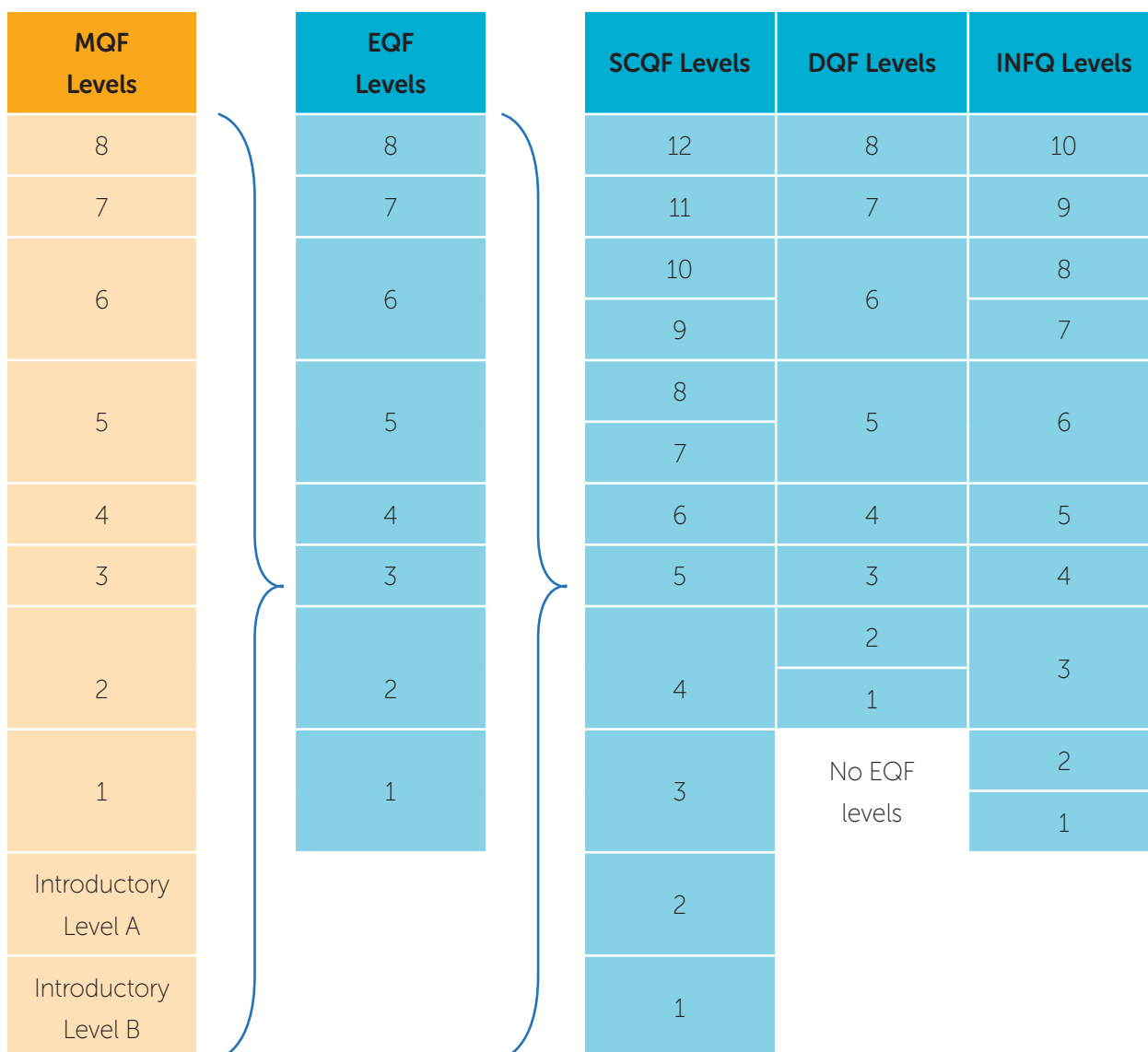


Figure 21: Process for Referencing of National Qualifications to that of other EU Member states

this Council of Europe/UNESCO Convention. In this convention countries agree to provide to individuals access to an assessment of their qualifications in another country. Each signatory country must recognise qualifications. Recognitions can provide access to higher education or exemption for periods of study in higher education courses. Recognition can also provide access to the labour market. Countries signatory to the Lisbon Convention are obliged to:

- develop procedures for the assessment of qualifications;

- provide information about their education system and programmes in Higher Education;
- appoint a national information centre (in the case of Malta this roles is fulfilled by the QRIC within NCFHE); and
- promote the issuing of the Diploma Supplement to graduates.

The ENIC Network (European Network of National Information Centres on academic recognition and mobility) was set up by the Council of Europe and UNESCO to develop

policy and practice for the recognition of qualifications. Countries have designated national ENIC centres which generally provide information on: the recognition of foreign diplomas, degrees and other qualifications; and education systems in both foreign countries and the ENIC's own country. The NARIC Network (National Academic Recognition Information Centres), on the other hand, is an initiative of the European Commission in 1984. The network aims at improving academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study in the Member states of the European Union (EU) countries, the European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Turkey. All Member countries have a designated centre which promotes the mobility of students, teachers and researchers by providing authoritative advice and information concerning the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study undertaken in other states (QRIC in the case of Malta).

In the absence of referencing of the NQF to meta-frameworks, the ENIC-NARIC network which provides information about education systems and qualifications in a wider number of countries, serves as the potential official link to national educational systems which may provide further information toward attaining the reference of qualifications across different countries. Any attempt to reference national qualifications through the information provided by the ENIC-NARIC network should be based on principles similar to those for the referencing process described previously, that is:

- institution is recognised;
- programmes of studies is offered by the recognised institution;
- duration of course;
- number of credits (reference to the Diploma Supplement);
- consultation with counterparts on ENIC-

NARIC for further confirmation and dissemination of information in general.

Where available, level descriptors at national level shall also be used as reference for comparison. While these principles do not constitute a referencing process, they can still enable some form of comparison of national qualifications to take place until a formal referencing process is developed globally.

3.7 MQF and ISCED

Another form of collecting data about education levels and qualifications obtained is through the International Standard Classification of Education (known as the ISCED levels). ISCED is the standard framework used to categorise and report cross-nationally comparable education statistics as in the case of statistics collected by Eurostat. ISCED is designed to serve as a framework to classify educational activities as defined in programmes and the resulting qualifications into internationally agreed categories. ISCED 2011 covers formal and non-formal education programmes offered at any stage of a person's life. ISCED does not cover programmes of informal, incidental or random learning, nor qualifications which are not recognised.

The main cross-classification variables of ISCED include levels and fields of education. Programmes and qualifications are further classified by complementary dimensions. These include:

- the programme orientation;
- completion of the ISCED level;
- access to higher ISCED levels; and
- position in the national degree and qualification structure.

Malta Qualifications Framework			ISCED 2011
8	Doctoral Degree		8 ISCED 8 Doctoral Degree/ PhD or equivalent
7	Master's Degree Postgraduate Diploma Postgraduate Certificate		7 ISCED 7 Master's Degree or equivalent
6	Bachelor's Degree		6 ISCED 6 Bachelor's Degree or equivalent
5	Undergraduate Diploma Undergraduate Certificate Higher Education Certificate	Foundation Degree VET Higher Diploma	5 ISCED 5 Short-cycle tertiary education
4	Matriculation Certificate Advanced Level Intermediate Level	VET Diploma ^(e)	4 ISCED 4 Post secondary education
3	General Education Level 3 SEC Grade 1-5	VET Level 3 ^(d)	3 ISCED 3 Upper-secondary education
2	General Education Level 2 SEC Grade 6-7 Secondary Education School Certificate and Profile (B)	VET Level 2 ^(c)	2 ISCED 2 Lower secondary education
1	General Education Level 1 Secondary Education School Certificate and Profile (A)	VET Level 1 ^{(a) (b)}	1 ISCED 1 Primary education
			ISCED 02 Pre-primary education (3 years)
			ISCED 01 Pre-primary education (0-2 years)

Figure 22: Comparison between the MQF and ISCED 2011

The ISCED classification consists of parallel coding schemes for education programmes (ISCED Programmes or ISCED-P) and levels of educational attainment (ISCED-Attainment or ISCED-A).⁵⁴

It is to be highlighted that ISCED has been developed to enable the comparison of different education systems and mainly for statistical and research purposes. It is not a tool for classifying qualifications with the purpose of helping learners and employers understand the level of learning that has been achieved. In fact, ISCED, unlike Qualifications Frameworks, is not based on learning outcomes, but besides identifying the level of learning, also includes references to the duration of an education programme, its orientation, and whether it leads to opportunities of further learning. The referencing of the MQF to ISCED is not as straightforward as in the case of the EQF, QF/EHEA, and the TQF; they are conceptually slightly different. The EQF only partially implies a hierarchy of educational programmes (e.g. a qualification on a higher level in the EQF very likely will correspond to a higher level on the ISCED levels). Likewise, on the EQF, there is also a hierarchy of occupations (e.g. a qualification on a lower EQF level will very likely lead to an occupational activity ranked on a lower level in the ISCO skill levels).⁵⁵

This does not mean, however, that it is not possible to identify the MQF and EQF level of a qualification obtained at the end of a programme

as well as identify the programme's ISCED Level. Figure 22 provides the matching of MQF with the different ISCED Levels. The Figure gives the broad indicative matching between the two classifications systems.

OECD actually considers programmes on a case by case basis. The Communication and Information Resource Centre for Administrations, Businesses and Citizens (CIRCABC) website maps individual programmes in Malta to ISCED levels, but the MQF and EQF mapping has yet not been made public.

3.8 Conclusion

The development of National Qualification Frameworks has been fast⁵⁶, with the number across Europe growing. Referencing to the EQF is also increasing, facilitating the recognition of qualifications and promoting the mobility of learners and workers.

This Chapter has described the different meta-frameworks and how the MQF can be referenced to these meta-frameworks. It has also defined the principles of how national qualifications can be referenced to other National Qualifications Frameworks through these meta-frameworks. The relationship between the MQF and the ISCED levels has also been discussed.

This document has presented the qualifications system for Malta and the legislative framework within which qualifications are conferred in the academic and vocational sector at different levels of the MQF. The system is designed to allow learners to move from one level or one sector to another as part of lifelong learning.

Glossary of Terms

Accumulation and transfer of qualifications^{57, 58}

Accumulation and transfer of qualifications means that training programmes or parts [units] of programmes are interchangeable. Validated learning outcomes can also exempt a person from part of a training programme. Accumulation and transfer of qualifications require that learning outcomes acquired in different contexts and at different times are compared as regards equivalence and relative value.

Accrediting entity

Legal entity, or that part of a legal entity, that conducts accrediting activities through voluntary peer review and makes decisions concerning the accreditation or pre-accreditation status of institutions, programs, or both.

Accreditation of programmes and institutions

The process of accrediting an institution of education and training, a programme of study, or a service, showing it has been approved by the relevant legislative and professional authorities after meeting predetermined standards.

Apprenticeship⁵⁹

Apprenticeship is the systematic, long-term training alternating periods at the workplace and in an educational institution or training centre. The apprentice is contractually linked to the employer and receives remuneration (wage or allowance). The employer assumes responsibility for providing the trainee with training leading to a specific occupation.

Assessment

The sum of methods and processes used to evaluate the attainments (knowledge, skills and competences) of an individual, and typically leading to certification.

Award

An Award in Malta refers to the title of certification of learning achieved through courses which do not have the required number of credits at the specific MQF Level to be a considered as a Qualification.

Awarding body

An awarding body issues qualifications (certificates or diplomas) formally recognizing the achievements of an individual, following a standard assessment procedure.

Bologna process

The Bologna process initiated by the Bologna Declaration of European Ministers of Education on 19th June 1999 is a commitment by countries forming part of the European Higher Education Area to harmonize the architecture of the European higher education system by improving external recognition and facilitating student mobility as well as employability.

Certificate/Diploma

An official document issued by an awarding body, which records the achievements of an individual following the successful completion of a training programme or a course of studies.

Certification (of knowledge, skills and competences)

A formal record of achievement based on a standard assessment of knowledge, skills and competences. Certificates or diplomas are issued by accredited awarding bodies.

Competence

‘Competence’ is the proven ability to use knowledge, skills and other abilities to perform a function against a given standard in work or study situations and in professional and/or personal development. In the EQF, ‘competence’ is described in terms of responsibility and autonomy.

Credits

Credits are one of the tools designed to facilitate the implementation of credit transfer systems at national and European level. They are used by authorities, education and training providers, awarding bodies and learners to support arrangements for accumulation and recognition of learning outcomes towards a qualification and for Trans-National mobility. Credits [credit points] are allocated to Qualifications and Awards to the units of which a qualification is made up. One credit (ECTS/ECVET) in Malta is considered as being equivalent to a workload of 25 hours of learning. The term workload refers to an estimation of the time an individual typically needs to complete all learning activities such as lectures, seminars, projects, practical work, work placements and individual study required to achieve the defined learning outcomes in formal learning environments.

Curriculum

A set of actions followed when setting up a training course: it includes defining training goals, content, methods (including assessment) and material, as well as arrangements for training teachers and trainers.

Distance Learning

Education and training imparted at a distance through communication media: books, radio, TV, telephone, correspondence, computer or video.

Employability

The combination of factors which enable individuals to progress towards or get into employment, and to progress during their career.

EQAVET quality improvement cycle

A quality assurance and improvement cycle of planning, implementation, evaluation/assessment and review/revision of VET, supported by common quality criteria, indicative descriptors and indicators.

European Standards and Guidelines (ESG)

These are the standards and guidelines for quality assurance in the European Higher Education Area.

European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

EQF stands for the European Qualifications Framework which is a *meta*-Framework to support translation and communication between national qualifications systems and Frameworks.

Formal learning

Learning that occurs in an organized and structured environment (in a school/training centre or on the job) and is explicitly designated as learning (in terms of objectives, time or resources). Formal learning is intentional from the learner’s point of view. It typically leads to certification.

Informal learning

Learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure. It is not organized or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support. Informal learning is in most cases unintentional from the learner's perspective. It typically does not lead to certification.

Initial education/training

General or vocational education carried out in the initial education system, usually before entering working life.

Key competences

The knowledge, skills and competences needed to function in contemporary society, e.g. listening, speaking, reading, writing, digital competence and mathematics among others.

Knowledge

Knowledge is the outcome of the collection and assimilation of information through learning. In the EQF, knowledge is described as being theoretical and/or factual.

Knowledge society

A society whose processes and practices are based on the production, distribution and use of knowledge.

Learning

Learning is a process by which individuals acquire and assimilate information, ideas and values, as well as practical and cognitive skills and other personal and social competences. They learn through personal reflection and reconstruction and through social interaction. This process takes place in formal, non-formal and informal learning settings.

Learning outcomes

Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner knows, understands and is able to do on completion of a learning process.

Level descriptors

Level descriptors express the level of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to higher or lower levels of achievements by the individual.

Lifelong learning

The rationale behind lifelong learning is continuous personal and professional development, with no age limit.

National Qualifications Framework

A National Qualifications Framework is a common reference point to all nationally recognized qualifications indicating level of education and training and progression from one level to another.

National Qualifications System

Qualification systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalising national or regional policy on qualifications, institutional arrangements, quality assurance processes, assessment and awarding processes, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society. Qualifications systems may be more or less integrated and coherent.

Meta-Framework

A Meta- Framework, like the EQF, is a classification instrument for levels of qualifications designed to act as a translation device between different national and sectoral qualifications systems. For this purpose, the criteria for levels in a meta-Framework are written in a highly generalized form and the EQF does not take over any of the established roles of national systems.

Mutual trust

Mutual trust is a term used in the context of qualifications to indicate quality assurance support measures and accountability in the awarding of certificates, diplomas and degrees.

Non-formal learning

Learning which is embedded in planned activities not explicitly designated as learning (in terms of learning objectives, learning time or learning support), but which contain an important learning element. Non-formal learning is intentional from the learner's point of view. It normally does not lead to certification.

Programme (of education and training)

An inventory of activities, learning content and/or methods implemented to achieve education or training objectives (acquiring knowledge, skills or competences), organized in a logical sequence over a specified period of time.

Quality assurance

Quality assurance is defined by Regulation 63 of Chapter 327, the Education Act as one or more processes which safeguards the quality of Further and Higher education within the economic, social and cultural context, on a national, European and international level; ensure the use of appropriate measures as a means of improving the quality of teaching, learning, training and research; and communicate the outcome of such findings within an internal and external framework of accountability.

Quality audit

Refers to an external evaluation process of internal quality assurance mechanisms adopted by a provider for its own use, and of the provider's adherence to any licensing, accreditation and other obligations under the Education Act or any regulations made thereunder, in order to continuously monitor and improve the operation of a provider or of a programme.

Qualification

A qualification is achieved when an Awarding body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to the standards in terms of level descriptors on the MQF and a number of credits as specified in the Referencing Report. A qualification is the formal outcome of an assessment and validation process.

Qualifications Framework

A Qualifications Framework provides a system of coordination for comparing qualifications by relating them to each other, for promoting the quality of education and training provisions, for establishing standards of knowledge, skills and wider competences and for introducing and maintaining procedures for access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning. The scope of a Qualifications Framework may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways in a country or may be confined to a particular sector.

Recognition of learning outcomes

Formal recognition is the process of granting official status to skills and competences either through the award of certificates or through the grant of equivalence, credit units, validation of gained skills and/or competences.

Recognition of qualifications

A formal acknowledgement by a competent authority of the value of a foreign educational qualification with a view to access educational and/or employment activities.

Referencing process

The referencing process involves the alignment of the levels of the NQFs to the EQF. This alignment involves the comparison of the level of difficulty established by the learning outcomes detailed in the level descriptors of the two (or more) frameworks with which the NQF is aligned.

Retraining

Retraining is a kind of training that enables individuals to acquire new skills giving access either to a new occupation or to new professional activities.

Sector

A sector is a range of professional activities on the basis of their main economic activity, product, service or technology (e.g. chemicals) or as a transversal professional category (e.g. marketing).

Sectoral qualifications system

A sectoral qualifications system is concerned with the qualifications process confined to a specified sector and may exist at national and international level.

Sectoral Qualifications Framework

A Sectoral Qualifications Framework is defined as the structures and processes established by a sector for the development and implementation of qualifications, including institutional arrangements, quality assurance, assessment and awarding procedures, skills recognition and other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market.

Self-accrediting provider

A public or private university, higher or further education institution established as a self-accrediting provider by the Act or by any regulation made thereunder, or by any other law, which by virtue of such status, has the capacity to self-accredit existing and new programmes and is exempt from provider and programme accreditation for the purposes of these regulations. Self-accrediting providers do not have the power to accredit other providers or their programmes (Subsidiary Legislation 327.433).

Skills

A skill is the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems. In the EQF, skills are described as cognitive (use of logical, intuitive and creative thinking) and practical (involving manual dexterity and the use of methods, materials, tools and instruments).

Social Partners

Social partners include employers' associations and trade unions forming the two sides of social dialogue.

Translation device

In the context of qualifications, the term is used to denote the language or methods of verifying the equivalence between one qualification and another. An NQF, for example, is a translation device to verify whether one qualification carries the same weight of another in terms of content, level of education and training and assessment.

Transparency of qualifications

Qualifications are transparent if their value is readable by, comparable and transferable, to other Frameworks: sectoral, regional, national or international. Transparency gives Trans-National value to qualifications.

Transferability of learning outcomes

The degree to which knowledge, skills and competences can be used in new occupational or educational environments, and/or are validated and certified.

Upskilling

Short-term targeted training typically provided following initial education or training, and aimed at supplementing, improving or updating knowledge, skills and/or competences acquired during previous training.

Validation (of Informal and Non-Formal Learning)

The process of assessing and recognizing a wide range of knowledge, know-how, skills and competences, which people develop throughout their lives within different environments, for example through education, work and leisure activities.

Valuing learning

All learning is valued when there is the recognition of achievement in formal, informal or non-formal learning.

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Consultation Process

Professionals Interviewed:

- Mr Matthew Agius, General Retailers & Traders Union
- Mr David Bonello, Officer, NCFHE
- Mr Gaetano Bugeja, Director Curriculum, Directorate for Lifelong Learning
- Mr Mario Cardona, Director, Department for Early School Leavers
- Ms Edel Cassar, Chief Executive Officer, NCFHE
- Ms Mary Anne Ciappara, Former Head, Qualifications Recognition Information Centre, NCFHE
- Ms Angelique Grech, Officer, NCFHE
- Ms Joanne Grima, Directorate for Lifelong Learning
- Dr Maria Magro Scerri, Officer, NCFHE
- Mr Sefton Mamo, Motherwell Bridge
- Ms Ninette Sammut, Assistant Director, Directorate for Quality & Standards in Education
- Ms Christine Scholz, Manager, Research & Policy Recommendation, NCFHE
- Ms SueAnn Scott Drago, Manager, National Statistics Office
- Mr Sandro Spiteri, Former Head, Quality Assurance Unit, NCFHE

Members of the Steering Committee:

- Mr Felix Borg, Head, ETC
- Mr Benny Borg Bonello, Manager, NCFHE
- Mr Stephen Cachia, Chief Executive Officer & Principal, MCAST
- Dr Jennifer Casingena Harper, Member, NCFHE Board
- Ms Edel Cassar, Chief Executive Officer, NCFHE
- Mr Pierre Fenech, Executive Director, ITS
- Prof Suzanne Gatt, Researcher
- Mr Ian Mifsud, Director General for Quality and Standards in Education, MEDE
- Dr Stefan Sant, Head, Qualifications Recognition Information Centre, NCFHE
- Prof Alfred Vella, Pro-Rector for Academic Affairs, UOM

Feedback Received from National

Stakeholders:

- Mr Anthony Abela, Senior Leader, St Martin's College Sixth Form
- Pastor Joseph Agius, Global Institute of Theology Malta
- Mr Nicholas Agius, Head Resource Centre, Maria Regina College
- Mr Matthew Agius, General Retailers & Traders Union
- Ms Jo-Anne Attard, Senior Executive, Academic Programmes, Quality & Resources Unit, UOM
- Mr Kevin Bonanno, Director, Aikido Yamato Dojo
- Mr Matthew Bonello & Mr Ryan Falzon, Kunsill Studenti Universitarji
- Mr Felix Borg, Head, ETC
- Dr Philip Caruana, Vice Principal, University Junior College
- Ms Rhoda Garland, National Commission for Persons with Disability
- Ms Grace Izzo, Centre for Child Development, Education and Care Studies
- Ms Pauleen Micallef, Pauleen's Dance Studio
- Prof Mario Pace, Senior Lecturer, UOM
- Ms Ninette Sammut, Assistant Director, Directorate for Quality & Standards in Education
- Ms SueAnn Scott Drago, Manager, National Statistics Office
- Dr Nadia Maria Vassallo, Foundation Courses, Learning Support Unit Coordinator, MCAST
- Prof Anthony Warrens, Dean for Education, Barts and the London School of Medicine & Dentistry

Reviews by International Experts

Dr Mike Coles

**International Consultant in Qualifications
Systems & UK Representative on the EQF AG**

Well I think it's a big step forward for referencing reports.

Firstly because it's a fourth edition and it underlines that referencing is on-going. It also builds on the earlier versions but this may be an issue as countries in the AG may still want the detail of how specific qualifications are linked to NQF levels and how the NQF levels are linked to the EQF levels. All this detail is in the earlier versions.

Secondly because it is very logical in the way it deals with what is quite a complex field. I admired the logical nature of the text.

Thirdly because it seemed to me to be written for people from Malta whilst being easy to understand from an international perspective. I liked this style.

Fourthly and most obviously because it sets the MQF at the centre and then reaches out to not one but four meta-frameworks. This is the future I think and you and your colleagues should feel proud of what you have done. It will attract some attention from people that see the world as EQF centred (as the EQF is a pure qualifications framework with a defined referencing process that the other frameworks do not have such processes). They will also say that you have made semi-official links to three other meta-frameworks which are not endorsed officially by the Commission or other MS. But I would sit tight and argue what you have done is right for Malta people.

Thanks again for letting me see it.

Mr John Hart, International Consultant on Education and Training Policy

First Round of Feedback

In these comments, I am assuming that this report is intended to be free-standing and so I make no significant references to the previous (2009) Referencing Report. However, in the summary response to EQF criterion 8, it is stated that this report is much shorter and more focused than previous reports. It is certainly a lot shorter than the 2009 report and, in my judgement, the implication that the 2009 report contained redundant material is correct. On the other hand, I did not find it more focussed.

As an international reader, I encountered three main problems with the report:

- i. I still had to read a lot of material (eg about the EQF and the validation of non-formal and informal learning) which the writers might have expected me to know and understand
- ii. I had to do a great deal of work to be clear on aspects of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) and on occasion found I had to refer back to the 2009 report to clarify points
- iii. There was no detailed analysis and comparison of the MQF and the EQF – surely the main reason for the report.

Purpose and readership

A significant part of the problem seems to me to lie in a confusion over the purpose of the report and the needs of the intended readership.

In the opening of Chapter 1 the report is said to be “Malta’s national document which describes the Malta Qualifications Framework and the different levels of qualifications in Malta”. Elsewhere it is suggested that it is the

main point of reference for both national and international stakeholders in and users of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). In section 1.1, the report goes on to say that it “describes how the MQF is compared to the EQF as well as the QF-EHEA”. However, further on in that section it states that the Referencing Report “sets the parameters for all Qualifications and Awards which can be conferred” (my emphasis) and that providers “need to have the Referencing Report at hand when designing courses”.

This suggests that the Report is to act both as an MQF Handbook for a wide range of national users and an account of how the MQF meets the EQF/QF-EHEA criteria for international judges. These seem to be quite different purposes.

This is a very demanding role for a single document. Since the needs of these two readerships are bound to be different in a number of ways. The national user needs information about the international context (eg the EQF) which the international reader probably does not require, and the international reader is likely to want detailed information about the national education and training system which is not required by the national reader. For example, the international reader is not likely to need the section at the beginning of Chapter 3 on meta frameworks and the EQF. Similar considerations apply to Chapter 4: Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning,

MQF-EQF comparisons

In dealing with the responses to the 10 EQF criteria in section 1.2 and elsewhere in the report, my comments draw heavily on the EC/Cedefop 2011 paper, “Referencing National Qualifications Levels to the EQF (European Qualifications Framework Series: Note 3).

Criterion 1: It would be worth mentioning the changeover from the Malta Qualifications Council to have some continuity from the previous Referencing Report and confirming the fact that the NCFHE is the NCP for Malta.

Criterion 2: Evidence presented for Criterion 2 refers the reader on to Chapter 3, where a series of comparisons, based on qualification types, are made between the MQF, the EQF (the point of the report), the QF-EHEA (also relevant), the TQF, ISCED and the CFER. However, no detailed analysis comparing the levels descriptors of the MQF with the EQF and the QF-EHEA is given here. This is a crucial point. The EQF and MQF level descriptors are presented side by side in section 2.3.1, but the reader is left to judge their compatibility – detailed analysis and commentary, making the case for comparability is needed. The EC/Cedefop paper puts this point very clearly: “Having established a clear and demonstrable link from each national level to an EQF level, it is important that this link is explained to a wide audience of interested parties – all assumptions and approximations should be made clear. In demonstrating the link between the levels referencing reports might usefully contain examples of qualifications that make the link clearer to national and international readers of the report.” (This actually seems to be acknowledged in the definition of “referencing process” in the glossary of the report.)

This problem is illustrated in practical terms in Table 6, where comparisons are made with the SCQF, DQF and INFQ. Without a detailed analysis and comparison of the contents of the MQF and EQF level descriptors, it will not be possible to say with confidence how MQF qualifications compare to Scottish German or Irish qualifications where two NQFs levels are referenced to one EQF level. Also, in the

case of the SCQF, without a comparison of level descriptors, there are no firm grounds for referencing the MQFs Access levels A and B, with the SCQF levels 2 and 1.

Also, the relevance of the TQF, ISCED and the CFER to the main purpose of the report is not clear. Perhaps these sections should be noted in background information or annexed if they are to be included. Also, although a reference is made in Tables 1 and 5, indicating that they are part of the MQF to the short cycle courses in higher education, the Dublin descriptor for these courses is not referred to as a basis for comparison and no reason is given for excluding it.

Criterion 3: Some detail about how level rating is carried out is needed (eg What processes and what evidence are rating experts expected to use? Is there published guidance? Is there an appeal process?) would have been helpful here or in chapter 2 (eg section 2.5).

I also think that an explanation of the “learning outcomes” section of the level descriptors is needed here and/or in section 2.3.1. The learning outcomes seem to duplicate the Knowledge, Skills and Competences (KSC) in a different form, so what are the differences, and why are the two sections necessary? When do those using the MQF refer to the KSC descriptors and when do they use the learning outcomes?

This is particularly confusing in sections 1.1 and 2.4. In section 1.1, there is a reference to institutions developing courses leading to “qualifications with level descriptors”. What is this? And in section 2.4, it is stated that “The learning outcomes [of an Award] need to reflect the level of learning indicated in the specific MQF level descriptor”. What does this refer to?

Criterion 4: Some information about the processes for the inclusion of qualifications in the MQF and removal of qualifications from the MQF is needed. Again, the EC/Cedefop paper puts this point clearly: “It is ... important that the way a qualification is located at a level is described in full”. Some summary reference to school qualifications and their relationship to the MQF is also needed here and elsewhere.

Criterion 5: A section in the Report, outlining the main principles and features of the National Quality Assurance Framework would have been helpful. Also a brief statement about the processes for school qualifications and a reference forward to section 2.5.

Criterion 6: Did the DQSE agree the report? This is not stated.

Criteria 7 & 8: There is some duplication here. Most reports include sections/annexes detailing the stakeholder bodies involved in preparing/ commenting on the report and give some information about the international experts and their views, both of which are recommended by EC/Cedefop, and both of which I personally find useful as an international reader of the reports. It appears that the Malta report will not do this although this would be a departure from good practice.

Criteria 9 and 10: I found it difficult to be clear about the meaning of the responses to these criteria.

Impact (section 1.4)

The report lists a number of situations in which the MQF levels are recorded or made clear by stakeholders in different sectors and says that these show that “the Malta Qualifications Framework has become a tool used within

the education and training sector across Further and Higher Education” (page 9). However, the brief account actually gives no evidence that this recording of MQF levels is more than a bureaucratic convention and I was left looking for information about practical uses these sectors make of the MQF.

On page 10 it states that “Concepts and tools introduced with the first publication of the Referencing Report in 2009 are today common tools used by education and training providers, employers and learners.” It would have been helpful to have been given examples.

There is a short section on the use of ECTS and ECVET. It appears that there is a clear split, with ECVET only being used up to level 4, but the report says that it can be used up to level 7. I was left asking how the two systems are brought together when ECVET credits are awarded above level 4. Can these two forms of credit be easily interchanged in the Malta system? Also, does this imply that all the parts (units) of qualifications and awards must be at the same level?

This issue also occurs in section 2.3 on key competences. Is the requirement for a “percentage of workload which will help learners acquire key competences” in each MQF VET qualification an input measure or an output measure? And if it is an output measure, does this mean that the key competences must all be achieved, and all at the same level as the overall qualification?

Section 1.4 notes that “a number of challenges still remain”. As an international reader trying to get a clear picture of the MQF, I would have found it helpful if there had been a paragraph indicating where the challenges lie and what steps are envisaged in the short, medium or long term to address these.

Presentation of the report

The report would benefit from the addition of a list of abbreviations used. The convention adopted for the introduction and subsequent use(s) of abbreviations also needs to be more consistently applied.

I would put the current sections 1.3 and 1.4 before the current section 1.2. This would provide important background information which would make section 1.2 much clearer. As it is, I found I had to keep referring forward to these sections when reading section 1.2 in order to understand what is said there.

The Glossary needs attention. 17 of the terms defined are not used and/or discussed in the report. These fall into three categories:

- i. Entries which indicate a lack of consistency in terminology in the MQF or the national system. Notable among these are “accumulation and transfer of qualifications”, “accrediting entity” and “self-accrediting entity” – these actual terms are not used in the main body of the report, although cognate terms are used.
- ii. Entries where the question arises, should there have been a section discussing this in the report? Notable here are “apprenticeship”, “awarding body”, “Initial education/training”, “regulated profession”. Either a new text needs to be added to the main body of the report or these entries should be deleted.
- iii. Entries which seem to be redundant – possibly left over from other drafts – and should probably be deleted: eg “continuing education and training”, “Copenhagen Declaration”, “ESG”, “human capital”

I would also recommend adding two definitions:

- “competent body” – as used on pages 14, 59 and 61
- “level-rating”

Second Round of Feedback

Overall comment

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), in response to its stakeholders has taken on the ambitious aim of creating a document which can serve both as a reference and rule book for the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) for a wide range of national users and an account of how the MQF meets the EQF/QF-EHEA criteria for international judges. As an international reader, I judge the current draft to give an account of the MQF which is comprehensive and accessible enough to allow me to grasp the essential outlines of the Maltese system and to support comparisons with other frameworks. I raised a number of issues regarding an earlier draft of the Referencing report.

MQF level descriptors

Effectively the descriptors are set out in two sections:

- Knowledge, Skills and Competences
- Learning Outcomes

This raises practical questions as to how the different parts of the level descriptors are used, by whom and for what purposes. I do not find answers to these questions in the response to EQF criterion 2 or elsewhere in the Report. It appears that those who develop qualifications and awards and level rate them are expected to match the specific learning outcomes of the qualifications and awards against the generic Learning Outcomes of the level descriptors. This section of the level descriptors is also used in making comparisons with the EQF level descriptors. The value and use of the Knowledge, Skills and Competence section of the Malta level descriptors remains unclear.

MQF levels

I found the detailed comparison of the EQF and MQF level descriptors puzzling. The Report notes that the MQF descriptors are more detailed than those of the EQF, but at many levels it is unclear whether the differences should be seen as implying that the MQF requires more and higher level skills, or only provides a more detailed description. The conclusions suggest that the latter is the case, but some of the actual comparisons suggest a different conclusion.

For example, at level 3, the Malta Report states that: "Both the EQF and the MQF agree on the importance of knowledge and understanding of facts and procedures in a field of work or study. However, the MQF introduces the element of personal initiative and, acknowledges the importance of theoretical knowledge at this level. It also introduces judgmental skills such as the assessment, evaluation and interpretation of facts establishing basic principles and concepts in a field of work or study." It also says, "Both frameworks agree on the range of developed skills and the basic problem solving skills. However, the MQF also states that the individual is capable of demonstrating the range of skills in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts." These analyses make MQF level 3 more like the descriptors for EQF level 4 than EQF level 3 but the case against referencing MQF level 3 to EQF level 4 is not made.

Similar concerns arise in relation to levels 1-3 of the MQF, and possibly to MQF level 4, although for some reason there is no analysis relating to MQF level 4.

Key Competences

Another area of the Report which remains unclear is about the use of key competences in qualification design. It is not clear in the Report

how it will be judged whether the set requirement for a specific "percentage of workload which will help learners acquire key competences" in each MQF VET qualification is met or what form of evidence will be judged. Will the evidence take the form of particular outcomes or will it come from guidance on teaching and learning?

There are related questions about what kind of achievement is anticipated. Must all the key competences be achieved in each qualification or award, or only those in the qualification/award specification? And how will the appropriate level for each key competence in each qualification/award will be set. In practical terms, how will it be ensured that learners seeking an entry qualification for a particular occupation which requires sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge at, say, level 3, will not be failed/debarred because of a lack of achievement at level 3 in a key competence which is not essential for the occupation?

"Qualifications" and "Awards"

The move to distinguish between Qualifications and Awards seems helpful and relatively straightforward. However, some questions arise about the criteria for Qualifications and Awards.

On page 35, the Report says that the term Qualification in Malta "is to be used to refer only to substantial programmes leading to a well-recognised and grounded form of certification e.g. a Bachelor degree, or to a form of certification associated with the capacity to undertake a defined occupational role". On the next page it adds that "Qualifications" up to Level 7 need to fulfil three criteria which do not refer to the requirement for recognition or groundedness. The criteria appear to be more about what is measurable than what is valued in specific sectors:

- Learning must be at the level descriptor equivalent to the specific qualification level targeted
- Learning must fulfil the number of credits required
- In the case of IVET Qualifications, that the number of credits includes the indicated percentage of the course dedicated to key competences (KC), sectoral skills (SS), and underpinning knowledge (UK).

The accreditation of an Award, meanwhile, implies either that the credit value is less than those specified for a Qualification at the particular MQF Level, or in the case of VET that there is not the required distribution of KC, SS and UK. According to the table on p39, a programme at level 3, for example, should have less than 60 credits if it is to be an Award. However, taking account of the rest of the other consideration, a level 3 programme of 80 credits which did not have the required distribution of KC, SS and UK could be an Award. As stated in the Report, it is not clear whether this is the case.

It also seems likely that programmes could be manipulated into accreditation as a qualification in two ways: (i) by padding out the programme to achieve the necessary number of credits or (ii) by manipulating the balance of workload for KC and/or SS and/or UK. It would be good to know how these ways of getting round the regulations might be guarded against.

Assigning credits

This section of the Report should be valuable to both national and international users. However, the opening statement, "Credits are assigned to different forms of teaching approaches" gives the wrong impression and might be better stated along the lines of the following: credits

are assigned to the outcomes of learning achieved through different forms of learning.

From the same perspective, it seems strange to set a minimum contact time in the allocation of credit to (the outcomes of) traditional courses: there is no rationale for this rule in the Report.

The section on assigning credit to work-based learning also raises questions. As it is set out it seems to imply that every case of work-based learning is unique and requires a discrete credit allocation. The Report states that "In assigning credits to work-based learning, the learning outcomes need to be identified and listed", but what precedes this statement implies that this will happen as a result of negotiation every time work-based learning occurs. Surely work-based learning is just a mode of achieving outcomes and these outcomes will (a) be set in advance of the learning and (b) standard for all learners in the particular field of work? The five principles set out on pp37-38 are useful but they seem to be more about the management of work-based learning than the allocation of credits.

MQF-EQF comparisons (minor issues)

Criterion 1: It would be worth confirming that the NCFHE is the EQF National Coordination Point for Malta.

Criterion 2: This criterion is about the link with the EQF. The Referencing Report states that "The detailed descriptors as well as the number of credits for qualifications in Malta are considered as the basis for ensuring a transparent referencing process." This cannot refer to the EQF which has no credit dimension.

Criterion 6: It is not affirmed that the referencing process includes the stated agreement of the relevant quality assurance bodies.

Mr Vincent McBride, Senior Specialist in VET Policies and Systems

I have no substantial suggestions for the report's amendment. I found the report well-structured and comprehensive. I think it describes clearly the system of qualifications in Malta and its relationship to the EQF and its referencing criteria. From the report, one is able to understand the system's governing principles and practices as well as the relevant supporting legislation and regulations. The report is concise and does not contain superfluous descriptions of the system or of the methods used in the different subsystems. In a couple areas, when I was seeking additional detail, I was able to follow the links in the footnotes and obtain the necessary information, eg, pp 8, 16, 18 and 19.

The description of the broad structure of VET qualifications of page 41 was also useful for placing sector specific skills in an articulating framework linked to underpinning knowledge and key competencies. Similarly, I could clearly understand the consultation process and the history of the development of the national qualifications framework in Malta. It was also particularly interesting to see the link with the TQF on page 68 as well as other member state NQFs.

Dr Jim Murray, Director of Academic Affairs, Institutes of Technology, Ireland

First Round of Feedback

Preliminary Remarks

I would like at the outset to thank the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) in Malta for the opportunity to comment on the draft Referencing Report (July 2015 draft). This is the fourth edition of the Referencing Report prepared by the Maltese authorities and, having commented on the 2009 edition, it is very interesting to consider the developments and changes in the education and training system in Malta that have occurred in the intervening period. Most of the comments that follow are presented as issues or questions that the Steering Committee overseeing the development of the Report might give further consideration to.

Some General Considerations

The first point worthy of comment is the fact that this is the **fourth** edition of the Maltese Referencing Report. In my view, this is a mark of the seriousness of intent that Malta has consistently displayed in engaging with qualifications frameworks, quality assurance matters and other aspects of the reform and modernisation of European education and training. I think it is a feature that should be commended and hopefully it will encourage other European states to engage with these matters in a similarly committed fashion. Also commendable is the effort that NCFHE has made to involve key national stakeholders in the referencing process, both through consultation events, and through the composition of the steering group; as is its determination to evaluate the impact of the MQF by means of the same consultation (pp. 8-10).

The fact, however, that it is the fourth edition of the Report does prompt an immediate question: is a fourth edition really necessary? Having read the report in detail, I am persuaded that it is. Since the last edition of the Report was published in 2012, a number of developments have taken place, which should be reflected in the documentation pertaining to the referencing of the MQF to the EQF, and the self-certification of its compatibility to the QF-EHEA.

In the first instance, two new 'access levels' (Access Level A and Access Level B) have been added to the MQF, which have been introduced to 'cover the learning gained, but not yet rated at Level 1'; 'to recognise any learning that has taken place' (presumably below MQF Level 1 and EQF Level 1); and 'to serve as stepping stones towards access to courses, such as VET qualifications, at Level 1' (draft Referencing Report, p. 15). Another change to the MQF that has occurred since 2012 is the manner in which qualifications are described. The term 'Qualification' is now used to refer only to substantial programmes that lead to 'well-recognised and historically grounded' forms of certification, and which meet certain parameters in relation to credit volume and the level of learning. Less substantial qualifications, which do not meet the minimum credit requirements, are now described as 'Awards' (draft Referencing Report, pp. 14, 28). It is important that these changes to the MQF levels and the nomenclature used to describe qualifications are reflected in the Referencing Report, because they raise important technical questions, which require further discussion and debate at the European level. In relation to the Access levels, the question arises as to whether there is a threshold level of learning at the beginning of EQF level 1, or whether EQF Level 1 comprehends all learning below the threshold beginning at EQF Level 2.

In relation to the nomenclature used to describe substantial and small qualifications, the question arises as to whether there is a need to develop a broader European understanding of these concepts and a common approach to how they are described.

As well as these purely qualifications-related developments, a new statutory body has also been established in Malta since the last referencing Report was published, the NCFHE, which has been set up, according to its mission statement, 'to foster the development and achievement of excellence in further and higher education in Malta through research, effective licensing, accreditation, quality assurance and recognition of qualifications established under the Malta Qualifications Framework'. The advent of the NCFHE, and the functions it has acquired in relation to quality assurance, qualifications recognition and the custodianship of the MQF, are hugely significant in terms of understanding the Maltese education and training system, and the place of the MQF within it, and should be reflected in the Referencing Report, given that one of the purposes of the Referencing Report is to explain national systems to an international audience. One final post-2012 development is also worthy of mention: this is the NCFHE's development and publication of a National Quality Assurance Framework.⁶⁰ The fact that Malta now has a new QA framework is particularly germane to the Referencing Report, as two of the referencing criteria and procedures (nos. 5 and 6), directly concern the manner in which national quality assurance systems underpin and support national qualification frameworks.

Having been persuaded that, on foot of the above changes, the publication of a new edition of the Referencing Report is justified, a

second question is prompted: does the Report adequately inform the reader – particularly, the international reader – about these significant changes? Here the answer is less clear cut. In my opinion, these changes are undersold in the Report. They are undoubtedly mentioned in several places, but they do not stand out, and are not consistently portrayed as the justification for publishing a new Referencing Report. Indeed, for the authors of the report, another, apparently more compelling reason has been identified for proceeding with a new edition of the report. A little confusingly, especially for an international reader, the Referencing Report not only aims to describe how the MQF ‘is compared to the European Qualifications Framework’ and the QF-EHEA (p. 2), or how, for Malta, it is the essential ‘tool’ through which it references its ‘qualifications framework to the EQF’ (pp. 42-43); but also, in response to local stakeholder feedback, it aims to become the key publication – in effect, a ‘user-friendly’ handbook – to support education and training stakeholders in designing qualifications that meet the parameters of the MQF (pp. 2-3, 8-9, 28-34), and to inform other stakeholders, especially employers, about the MQF (pp. 4, 7 (criterion 8)).

As an external observer, it is not a matter for me to comment on the validity or otherwise of this approach. It is clearly Malta’s own prerogative to decide how it wishes to utilise its Referencing Report. However, I think this multi-purpose approach needs to be more clearly signposted. Perhaps, the steering committee might consider dividing the report into two parts. The first part would deal exclusively with the technical referencing of the MQF to EQF and QF-EHEA, and highlight the changes that have taken place in the system since the 2012 Report appeared, and where they impact on the referencing criteria and procedures. Part 1, thus, might

bring together section 1.2 on the criteria and procedures (pp. 4-7), and the material on the meta-European meta-frameworks and European national frameworks in chapter 3 (pp. 37-40, 43-44). It could also contain the overview of the national system (pp. 11-13), supplemented by short overviews of the MQF (pp. 15-16), and the national quality assurance framework (based on the brochure on the NCFHE website).⁶¹ In addition, it might also contain the material on validation, which is now a growing part of the national system and relevant to the third referencing criterion (pp. 51-57).

Part 1 would thus serve to fulfil the technical requirements of the referencing process, and provide an international audience with a general overview of the national education and training system and how it compares to the education and training systems elsewhere in Europe. The second part of the Report, in contrast, would serve as the ‘handbook’ for national stakeholders, and include the material relating to the national consultation and its implications (pp. 8-10); the level descriptors of the MQF (pp. 17-27); and the requirements that are necessary for designing qualifications to be included in the MQF (pp. 28-36). It could also contain a section on Qualifications Recognition and the work of QRIC in NCFHE, which might encompass relevant material in chapter 3 on the referencing beyond the European frameworks. Whether such an approach is adopted or not, I think it is necessary to clearly set out in the introduction to the Report that the document has a twofold intent: namely, to fulfil the technical requirements of referencing the MQF to the EQF, and self-certifying its compatibility to QF-EHEA; and to act as a user-friendly ‘handbook’ for national users of the MQF.

Specific comments

As well as the above general observations, the following comments are offered on particular sections of the existing draft.

Chapter 1

Section 1.2 Criteria of the Referencing Report

- Criterion 2 (p. 5) states that the 'link between the MQF and the EQF is in terms of progression or the levels of difficulty'. Can anything more be said about the learning outcomes in the MQF and how they capture and specify comparable levels of learning across the MQF and EQF?
- Criterion 4 (p. 5) rightly sets out the current legislative and quality assurance arrangements, i.e., those that have been introduced since 2012. Should something be said (perhaps through a cross reference to the earlier reports) about the arrangements that were in place for including qualifications pre-2012?
- Criterion 5 (p. 6) admirably describes the legal and administrative basis of the national quality assurance system. However, it does not state clearly how these structures refer, as required by the criterion, to the MQF. I think this needs to be specified more clearly. For example, you might state that the NCFHE's standard setting role is grounded in the learning outcomes of the MQF's level descriptors. Or you might clarify whether the external quality audits, that are due to commence in October 2015, will examine how the MQF level descriptors are used in the design of qualifications. There is, in fact, a clear statement about this on p. 15, which might be added in here: 'All education and training providers conferring national qualifications in Malta need to fulfil the National Quality Assurance Framework'. You might also cross-refer to section 2.5

(pp. 33-36), which sets out how awards are accredited and placed on the MQF.

- Criterion 6 (p. 6) is a little ambiguous as to whether the quality bodies have formally stated their agreement to the referencing process. Presumably NCFHE (as the progenitor of the report) has agreed to it, and this might be stated more directly. Has DQSE formally agreed to the report? Perhaps this too could be specified more clearly, especially as the section on 'Accreditation in General Education' (p. 36) does not do so.
- Criterion 9 (p. 7) might state more clearly that NCFHE intends to forward the finalised 4th edition report to the EQF platform.

Chapter 3

Section 3.1 Meta-Frameworks

- There is a statement on p. 37 that the European Qualifications Framework 'includes all the existing National Qualifications Frameworks of countries in Europe'. Elsewhere, EQF is described as a 'translation tool' to enable comparisons to be made between qualifications awarded in different member states (p. 38). I think the latter statement is more accurate and should be maintained consistently throughout.

Sections 3.6 and Section 3.7 on referencing MQF to ISCED and CEFR

- The 'referencing' of MQF to ISCED and CEFR is an interesting aspect of the report. However, I wonder whether it is advisable to discuss these processes in the same section as the referencing of MQF to EQF and its self-certification to QF-EHEA. All of these processes are methodologically dissimilar, and by putting them side by side it might be interpreted that they are comparable and carry the same force as the referencing process proper, which has been developed

and agreed at the European level. While I would not advocate removing them altogether from the report they might be hived off into a separate chapter.

Chapter 4

Section 4.2 on the European Perspective to the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning

- On p. 52, it is stated that the value of Non-Formal and Informal learning was recognised through the European Council's common principles of 2004. While this is undoubtedly true, you might also want to reference the more recent 2012 Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-Formal and Informal Learning.⁶²
- On p. 54, reference is made to the 'Main Overseeing Structure' that will act as the overarching authority for the validation process. Is it intended that this role will be performed by NCFHE or will it be another body? If it is possible, this should be clarified.

Concluding Comment

Overall, I think the document is a good piece of work, and builds upon and extends the content of the previous Maltese reports. I think the intention to produce a more concise and user-friendly document that is relevant and useful to national stakeholders is admirable. However, in doing so, care should be taken so that 'main objective' of the Report, that it will be first and foremost the 'tool' through which Malta references its qualifications to the EQF (p. 43), is not diluted in any way.

Second Round of Feedback

I have reviewed the second draft of the Maltese Referencing Report. I note the changes that have been made subsequent to the first draft. These include (among others) adding a section on the National Quality Assurance Framework for Further and Higher education (pp. 45-6) and the reorganisation of the existing material, especially with regard to incorporating the material on validation (previously Chapter 4), into an expanded chapter 2. I also note that a number of clarifications have been made to the 'Criteria of the Referencing Report to the EQF' (section 1.1, pp. 6-11). Overall, I think these changes work well. The report is comprehensive and clear and I am happy to endorse this draft as one of your international experts.

May I make one small suggestion. At the bottom of p. 24, you might add a short introductory sentence (s) to introduce the tables (pp. 25-34) that demonstrate the compatibility of the level descriptors of the MQF and EQF. It might run as follows: 'The following tables compare the level descriptors of the MQF and EQF. Both sets of descriptors are stated in terms of Knowledge, Skill and Competences and the learning outcomes achieved. They demonstrate the compatibility of the descriptors, both in terms of their linguistic similarity and the progressive levels of difficulty in the learning associated with them'. I think these sentences would strengthen and clarify the good work you have done in this chapter and underscore the statement on criterion 2 (p. 7). Perhaps you might also consider cross-referring to these tables in the said statement on criterion 2.

Mr Lemalu Lafi Sanerivi, Senior Education Specialist, Secretariat of the Pacific Community, Fiji

First Round of Feedback

Introduction:

This brief commentary relates to the Referencing Report of the Malta Qualifications Framework against the European Qualifications Framework and the Qualifications Framework of the European Higher Education Area. These comments are made possible by invitation of the Chief Executive Officer of the NCFHE through email communication of 27th March from which this excerpt is extracted “Considering your experience, NCFHE would like to request your participation in this committee. It would require a desk-based review of the draft report as well as possibly a number of Skype meetings.” I thank the CEO NCFHE for the opportunity to access the Report and more so for the opportunity to provide a few comments on it.

Referencing NQFs to a meta-framework is a new process for most Agencies, and persons engaged in developing national and regional qualifications frameworks. One needs to shy from a strictly “technical process” and be more engaging with stakeholders and interested parties as reflected by this Draft Report for the MQF against the EQF and QF-EHEA.

The Report Introduction Provided useful background information on the MQF, EQF and the QF-EHEA and the various consultations in their developments. Good discussion of the EQF ten referencing criteria.

Section 1: The European Education Reform

Useful background for someone from outside the EU region with little to no knowledge of

the EU EQF or QF-EHEA development process. Some discussion of the ENQA-VET is made here (pages 47-48).

Section 2: The MQF

This section discusses the MQF and its developments. Sub-section 2.3.1 discusses Internal Quality Assurance (QA) for institutions but no explicit details (of standards and guidelines) to guide external QA and subsequently guides the external audit. There is no mention of the MQF Quality Assurance strategy that underpins the MQF in particular, quality standards for assessing Institutional capability, unless this is nested with their the Internal Quality Assurance and the DGSE strategies. The Report also discusses in detail the close alignment of the development of the MQF against EQF and QD-EHEA principles (page 51). The QA Framework document ESF1.227 “Making Quality Visible” attempts to complement the ESG and QAVET documents which is fine and suits Malta’s close relations with the European Union, is noted.

Sub-section 2.6 (pages 71 to 78) provides a discussion of the details of the MQF including its credit system and how it is aligned with the EQF and QF-EHEA. This is good as it gets the international reader to focus on other issues in the latter Sections of the Report after clarification of the credit system.

Section 3: Referencing the MQF against the EQF and QF-EHEA

An effective level by level comparison and commentary. The challenge for me was aligning the taxonomy of the MQF to the EQF and QF-EHEA. In referencing other Frameworks, the challenge is usually around aligning the taxonomies of the Framework outcomes (e.g. knowledge, skills and competences).

The sliding scales of Key Competences, Sectoral Skills and Underpinning knowledge on pages 71 and 74 helps the reader understand the increasing complexities from one Framework level to the next higher. The subsequent alignment of MQF Levels to the EQF and QF-EHEA facilitates comparison of the increasing complexities of Level Descriptors' knowledge, skills and competences amongst the three Frameworks. I would assume that the EQF and QF-EHEA taxonomies can be deconstructed to match the MQF taxonomy.

The extra detail in the Level descriptors of the MQF compared with the EQF is understood and expected when comparing a national framework against a meta-framework. The additional detail on NQF descriptors facilitate operational understanding by Institutions of the MQF requirements and expectations of how MQF learning outcomes match the Institutional outcomes of programmes and courses.

Final comments:

I again commend the NCFHE for a thorough and engaging process it went into through consultations with stakeholders and Social Partners including comments from international experts. It has formed the basis of an informed and solid Referencing Report which readers find useful and can be a document for how referencing should be carried out. This Referencing Report goes beyond than just a 'technical exercise' which it needs to be for completion purposes and a meaningful outcome.

The comparisons of the MQF against the ISCED and Commonwealth of Learning's Transnational Qualifications Framework (COL-TQF) frameworks are also important and useful additional information the NCFHE has included in this Referencing Report.

Thank you for the opportunity to reflect on this Report.

Second Round of Feedback

General Comments

The reduction from a two-column 260 page Report to 89 pages is a huge achievement by NCFHE for the Reader. The reduction has lost some of the important dialogue and evidence on various aspects of the "necessary conversations" that provided context and detail to the Report. However, if the Readers of the Second Draft had also read the First draft, they would be very pleased and enjoy the more direct focus on the Referencing Process in the Second Draft and still reflect on the background previously provided by the First Draft.

The opportunity to provide further comments on the Second Draft Report is appreciated as a learning exercise and an opportunity to be exposed to the quality of work by the NCFHE.

The purpose of Referencing Reports is to determine the degree of alignment and then modify one to improve the alignment where there are areas of contention. A more general approach is to do a comparison for creating "conversations" on how one compares to the other without obligations for alignment. However, as the EQF is a meta-framework for the European region, it is vitally essential that "referencing" is conducted in order for its potential benefits to be realised.

Some Specific Comments:

- 1. An Executive Summary:** It would help to have an Executive Summary of the Referencing Exercise at the beginning of the Report (before Chapter 1) that

summarises the result whether or not the two Frameworks are aligned or not. The details can be found in Chapter 2 but the Executive Summary will provide the highlights of the exercise.

2. The MQF Levels A and B: Having had a second look at the Level Descriptors for Levels A, B and Level 1, it seems that both Levels A and B can be easily accommodated within Level 1. This is based on an understanding that Level 1 is developed broadly enough as an entry level for any learner who had left Education and Training and wishes to reenter, or of a freshman who has just started out. This is just a personal reflection/observation from reading and comparing the Level Descriptors of the three Levels (A, B and Level 1). This observation is by no means trying to force equivalence of languages used in the Descriptors, but taking a broad perspective of the "Learning outcomes" within a learning context.

3. Section2: Referencing the MQF against the EQF:

- a. EQF Referencing Criteria: The discussion of the EQF referencing criteria on pages 6 to 11 is useful to understand how each criterion is interpreted. In the continuing Referencing exercise, relevant references to the Criteria would have been useful for comparison on how each criterion is applied; or summarised at some stage.
- b. The comparison of the two QFs is very clear and reflects their degree of alignment in pages 27-34.
- c. It is noted that qualifications at Levels A and B do not carry credits.

4. Credit system: A lengthy and clear discussion of the how the MQF credit system is linked

to the EQF Credit system and how it applies to various modes of learning and each qualification attempted is appreciated.

5. MQF referencing against the COL-TQF (pages 66-67):

This is a useful exercise to include the TQF as a meta-framework in the Report. The aspect that will require further commentary is on how the COL-TQF credit system matches up with that of the MQF or EQF. The COL-TQF defines one credit to be approximately equivalent to ten notional hours of learning whereas the MQF has it as twenty five notional hours of learning. This cannot be an arithmetic conversion with a scale factor as the definition of credit is about the average time in hours an average learner achieves the learning outcomes of a programme of study. This aspect of the two frameworks needs a fuller discussion and comparison for clarity and improved alignment both for the MQF and the EQF against the COL-TQF.

6. MQF against the EHEA: This relationship is well documented and was well discussed in the earlier version of the Report.

7. The other Referencing Reports: As for the Work in the Pacific region, it is assumed that if $A=B$ and $B=C$, then $A=C$. This is how the EQF can function as a meta-framework without each NQF being referenced against each other to ascertain their relationships. However, this assumption relies very much on a thorough Referencing process by each participating country or system.

8. Thank you again for the opportunity to observe the development of the MQF Referencing to the EQF and other meta-frameworks. The opportunity to comment is much appreciated.



Annexes

Annex: Level Descriptors of the EQF

EQF Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
Level 8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work or study and at the interface between fields.	The most advanced and specialised skills and techniques, including synthesis and evaluation required to solve critical problems in research and/or innovation while extending and redefining existing knowledge or professional practice.	Demonstrate substantial authority, innovation, autonomy, scholarly and professional integrity and sustained commitment to the development of new ideas or processes at the forefront of work or study contexts including research.
Level 7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of knowledge in a field of work or study, as the basis for original thinking and/or research Critical awareness of knowledge issues in a field and at the interface between different fields.	Specialised problem-solving skills required in research and/or innovation in order to develop new knowledge and procedures and to integrate knowledge from different fields.	Manage and transform work or study contexts that are complex, unpredictable and require new strategic approaches; take responsibility for contributing to professional knowledge and practice and/or for reviewing the strategic performance of teams.
Level 6	Advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of theories and principles.	Advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in a specialised field of work or study.	Manage complex, technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision-making in unpredictable work or study contexts; take responsibility for managing professional development of individuals and groups.

EQF Level	Knowledge	Skills	Competence
Level 5	Comprehensive, specialised, factual and theoretical knowledge within a field of work or study and an awareness of the boundaries of that knowledge.	A comprehensive range of cognitive and practical skills required to develop creative solutions to abstract problems.	Exercise management and supervision in contexts of work or study activities where there is unpredictable change; review and develop performance of self and others.
Level 4	Factual and theoretical knowledge in broad contexts within a field of work or study.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to generate solutions to specific problems in a field of work or study.	Exercise self-management within the guidelines of work or study contexts that are usually predictable, but are subject to change; supervise the routine work of others, taking some responsibility for the evaluation and improvement of work or study activities.
Level 3	Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts, in a field of work or study.	A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information.	Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study; adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving problems.
Level 2	Basic factual knowledge of a field of work or study.	Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools.	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy.
Level 1	Basic general knowledge.	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks.	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context.

Annex: Descriptors on the QF/EHEA

Cycle	Outcomes	ECTS Credits
3rd Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the third cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have demonstrated a systematic understanding of a field of study and mastery of the skills and methods of research associated with that field; • have demonstrated the ability to conceive, design, implement and adapt a substantial process of research with scholarly integrity; • have made a contribution through original research that extends the frontier of knowledge by developing a substantial body of work, some of which merits national or international refereed publication; • are capable of critical analysis, evaluation and synthesis of new and complex ideas; • can communicate with their peers, the larger scholarly community and with society in general about their areas of expertise; • can be expected to be able to promote, within academic and professional contexts, technological, social or cultural advancement in a knowledge based society. 	Not Specified
2nd Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the second cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding that is founded upon and extends and/or enhances learning that is typically associated with the first cycle, and that provides a basis or opportunity for originality in developing and/or applying ideas, often within a research context; • can apply their knowledge and understanding, and problem solving abilities in new or unfamiliar environments within broader (or multidisciplinary) contexts related to their field of study; • have the ability to integrate knowledge and handle complexity, and formulate judgments with incomplete or limited information, that includes reflection on social and ethical responsibilities linked to the application of their knowledge and judgments; • can communicate their conclusions, and the knowledge and rationale underpinning these, to specialist and non-specialist audiences in a clear and unambiguously manner • have the learning skills to allow them to continue to study in a manner that may be largely self-directed or autonomous. 	Typically include 90-120 ECTS credits, with a minimum of 60 credits at the level of the 2nd cycle

Cycle	Outcomes	ECTS Credits
1st Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the first cycle are awarded to students who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon their general secondary education, and is typically at a level that, whilst supported by advanced textbooks, includes some aspects that will be informed by knowledge at the forefront of their field of study; • can apply their knowledge and understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach to their work or vocation, and have competences typically demonstrated through devising and sustaining arguments and solving problems within their field of study; • have the ability to gather and interpret relevant data (usually within their field of study) to inform judgments that include reflection on relevant social, scientific or ethical issues; • can communicate information, ideas, problems and solutions to both specialist and non-specialist audiences; • have developed those learning skills that are necessary for them to continue to undertake further study with a high degree of autonomy. 	Typically include 180-240 ECTS credits
Short Cycle	<p>Qualifications that signify completion of the higher education short cycle (within the first cycle) are awarded to students who:</p> <p>have demonstrated knowledge and understanding in a field of study that builds upon general secondary education and is typically at a level supported by advanced textbooks. Such knowledge provides an underpinning for a field of work or vocation, personal development, and further studies to complete the first cycle;</p> <p>can apply their knowledge and understanding in occupational contexts;</p> <p>have the ability to identify and use data to formulate responses to well-defined concrete and abstract problems;</p> <p>can communicate their understanding, skills and activities, with peers, supervisors and clients; possess the learning skills to undertake further studies with some autonomy.</p>	Typically includes 120 ECTS credits

Annex: Level Descriptors for the TQF

Level	Descriptors	Minimum Credit
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Acquire and possess a systematic understanding of a substantial body of knowledge which is at the forefront of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional practice; be able to create and interpret new knowledge at a most advanced frontier of a field of work or study through original and advanced research of a quality to satisfy peer review, extend the forefront of the discipline and merit publication; possess the most advanced and specialised skills and techniques to be able to conceptualise, design and implement a project for the acquisition of new knowledge or to solve critical problems or to refute or redefine existing knowledge; demonstrate authority, innovation, autonomy, integrity and personal responsibility to the production or development of innovative ideas or processes in the context of an academic discipline, field of study or area of professional. 	360 Doctorate
9	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Have a logical understanding of a body of substantially practised specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront of their academic discipline, field of study, or area of professional practice, as a basis for original thought and/or the conduct of research and/or enquiry; have a comprehensive understanding of the research skills and/or relevant established techniques applicable to their own research or to advanced scholarship that can be used to create and interpret knowledge; demonstrate originality in the application of knowledge to solve problems, together with a practical understanding of how knowledge can be managed to transform work or study; possess a conceptual understanding of how to analyse and critically evaluate current research in their academic discipline, field of study or work and to solve problems. 	240 Masters

Level	Descriptors	Minimum Credit
8	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have systematic, extensive and comparative knowledge of the key aspects of their academic discipline, field of study or work; • possess an ability to deploy accurately established analytical tools and/or techniques and enquiry within their academic discipline, field of study or work; • be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills of a wide range of concepts, ideas and information to devise and sustain arguments and/or to solve problems; • display a critical understanding of the uncertainty, ambiguity and limits of knowledge and how it is developed; • possess the ability to manage their own learning and to make use of scholarly reviews and primary sources (e.g. refereed research articles and/or original materials appropriate to the discipline). 	120 Bachelor (Hons)
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have advanced knowledge of a field of work or study, involving a critical understanding of the well-established principles and including an understanding of some advanced aspect(s) of their area(s) of their field of work or study; where appropriate, the application of those principles in an employment context; • have an understanding of the limits of that knowledge and how this influences analysis and interpretation based on that knowledge; • possess advanced skills, demonstrating mastery and innovation, required to solve complex and unpredictable problems in their specialised field of work or study; • be able to manage complex technical or professional activities or projects, taking responsibility for decision making in unpredictable work or study contexts. 	360 Bachelor

Level	Descriptors	Minimum Credit
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Possess an in-depth knowledge and critical understanding of the ideas, concepts and principles in their field of work or study; • have knowledge of the methods of enquiry in the subject, and use a range of techniques to initiate and undertake critical analysis of information, proposing solutions to problems arising from that analysis; • demonstrate an ability to critically evaluate and apply the appropriateness of different approaches to solving problems; • apply those concepts and principles more widely; • have an understanding of the limits of their knowledge, and how this influences analyses and interpretations; • effectively communicate information, arguments and analysis, in a variety of forms, to specialist and non-specialist audiences, and deploy key techniques of the discipline effectively; • have the qualities necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of personal responsibility and decision-making. 	<p>240</p> <p>Advanced Diploma of Higher Education</p> <p>Associate Degree</p>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying ideas, concepts and principles in a field of work or study; • be able to use their knowledge, understanding and skills to critically evaluate and determine appropriate methods and procedures to respond to a range of problems of a generally routine nature; • display qualities and transferable knowledge and skills necessary for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility; • communicate the results of their field of study or work accurately and reliably using a range of different modalities; • identify and articulate their own learning needs within defined contexts and undertake guided further learning in new areas. 	<p>240</p> <p>Diploma of Higher Education</p> <p>Associate Degree</p>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have a broad knowledge and understanding of the main underlying concepts and principles in a field of work or study; • demonstrate a basic understanding of the major theories, principles, ideas and concepts of their particular area of study; • be able to use different approaches to identify, evaluate and solve problems of a generally routine nature; • be able to use their knowledge, understanding of a particular subject area to communicate accurately and reliably with structured and coherent arguments; • use their knowledge, understanding and skills to undertake further learning within a structured and managed environment; • possess the qualities and transferable skills needed for employment in situations requiring the exercise of some personal responsibility. 	<p>120</p> <p>Certificate</p>

Level	Descriptors	Minimum Credit
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate awareness of basic concepts and principles in a field of work or study; • have command of analytical interpretation of information • express informed judgment; • able to display a range of known responses to familiar problems. 	40 Upper Secondary Education: Certificate III National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate a narrow range of applied knowledge and basic comprehension in a field of work or study; • a narrow range of skills in a field of work or study; • able to use known solutions to familiar problems. 	40 Lower Secondary Education: Certificate II National Vocational Qualification (NVQ)
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate basic literacy and numeracy skills. 	40 Entry Level 1 Certificate I

Endnotes

1. A historical account of the development of the MQF and the Referencing Report can be obtained in the previous editions. Accessible from: <http://www.ncfhe.org.mt/> - Resources Section
2. Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning in Official Journal of the European Union 2008/C 111/01. Accessible from: [http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32008H0506\(01\)](http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:32008H0506(01))
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