

VALUING ALL LEARNING

A National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

A Working Document

prepared by the

Malta Qualifications Council

April 2007

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The Malta Qualifications Council is composed of Charles Mizzi as Chairman, Felix Borg, Anthony DeGiovanni, Veronica Grech, Grace Grima, Charmaine Portelli and Emmanuel Zahra as Members.

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MESSAGE

FROM THE MINISTER OF EDUCATION, YOUTH AND EMPLOYMENT,
THE HON. DR LOUIS GALEA

It is my government's firm commitment to enhance vocational education and training in Malta. Over the last ten years, vocational education and training has had remarkable innovations and success stories. The opening of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology, the increase in the quality and number of training courses at the Employment and Training Corporation and at the Institute of Tourism Studies, as well as the strengthening of adult education provision by state and private institutions are significant steps towards a knowledge-based society.

These working documents prepared by the Malta Qualifications Council, lay the foundations of Malta's National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (NQF) within the context of vocational education and training. They are also documents which propose Malta's NQF within the European Qualifications Framework which, on the 5th of September 2006, the Commission adopted a proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the EQF. In the last week of September 2006, the EP adopted the report by Thomas Maan on the creation of an EQF. It is expected that the EP will adopt the EQF in Autumn 2007. They spell out the standards and criteria on which such a framework is based and the necessary steps that stakeholders need to take to ensure that vocational education and training qualifications in Malta become tools for mobility, progression, transferability and employment.

This is a very essential step in our reform programme in education and training. Malta's proposed NQF lays the groundwork for a bridging exercise between vocational education and compulsory education on the one hand and higher education on the other. Malta's NQF is a neutral device which locks together in synergy and complementarily, the four main educational strands: Compulsory, Vocational, Higher and Adult education. This is, in my opinion, the main function of our National Qualifications Framework. It illustrates, in a transparent manner, the various routes to learning. It aims at valuing all learning in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. It provides clear pathways to learning experiences which can lead to employability and personal enrichment. It opens up the opportunities for public and private training providers to build the professional capacity within their organizations in order to ensure quality education at all levels of their training provision. It gives Malta the opportunity to have an autonomous and self-regulating system of education and training at all levels and in all sectors.

The challenges that an NQF poses on us are to build our capacity to create qualifications that are demand-driven and directly related to Malta's economic and social needs; to ensure that such qualifications fit within an agreed qualifications framework for lifelong learning; to guarantee that Malta's qualifications are recognized nationally and internationally and serve to attract overseas learners of the highest quality, and finally, that informal, non-formal and prior learning as well as sectoral qualifications form the backbone of Malta's NQF in the years to come.

I wish to encourage all stakeholders to play an active and constructive role in this ongoing process. Malta's NQF and our vocational education and training system are instrumental in addressing our economic needs, in building capacity in vital sectors of our economy and in ensuring that all learning is valued against agreed standards and criteria.

Most of all we want an NQF and a VET system, including quality assurance, which respond to inclusion, competitiveness and excellence.

LOUIS GALEA

PREFACE

The aim of publishing three working documents is to instigate an informed dialogue on the proposed National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning and the implications of the Framework to vocational education and training, the sector which falls within the remit of the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC).

MQC was set up in December 2005 to steer the development of a national qualifications framework and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the Framework and which is not already provided for by compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies.

The working documents carry a single title *Valuing all Learning*. It indicates MQC's objective of providing the standards, criteria and infrastructure necessary to value all formal, informal and non-formal learning within the parameters established by Legal Notice 347 of 2005. The working documents reflect the discussions carried out within MQC and with key stakeholders and international consultants commissioned to critically review these documents.

The first document entitled *A National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning* focuses on the philosophy underlying the level descriptors for each of the eight levels designed to represent all qualifications in Malta. The Framework has two distinctive routes: the academic and the vocational route which converge into the higher education sector defined in terms of the Dublin descriptors. Each level is described in detail indicating its implications to learners and other key stakeholders in particular training providers, employers, those representing workers and social partners.

The second working document entitled *AVET System for Malta's National Qualifications Framework* looks at our current VET system within the proposed NQF and focuses on aspects related to the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in relation to mobility, progression, transferability and employability. The document illustrates how our VET system requires the intensive capacity building and the support of a comprehensive policy which adopts an outcome approach to accreditation, learning, assessment and certification. The document also focuses on the importance of having VET programmes driven by industry.

The third document spells out a *Quality Assurance Policy for VET within the NQF*. It illustrates MQC's policy on quality assurance support mechanisms for vocational education and training. Aware of the fact that VET institutions in Malta may possess quality assurance policies, this document draws on the proposed VET quality assurance policy published by the European Commission to suggest an overall QA policy for Malta's VET provision.

We hope that these three documents will stimulate discussion and form the basis of an agreed policy for a National Qualifications Framework that adds quality and visibility to vocational education and training and opens up new opportunities for learning within and outside our public and private training institutions.

Valuing all Learning is the goal that MQC aims to achieve through its policies and standards. We are confident that these documents will provide a valuable support to engage key stakeholders to participate in this ongoing dialogue.

CHARLES MIZZI
Chairman

JAMES CALLEJA
A/Chief Executive

Abbreviations

AQF	- Australian Qualifications Framework
BTEC	- Business & Technology Education Council
CS	- Certificate Supplement
DS	- Diploma Supplement
ECTS	- European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System
ECVET	- European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training
EHEA	- European Higher Education Area
ENIC	- European National Information Centre
ENQA	- European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
EQF	- European Qualifications Framework
ERA	- European Research Area
ERDF	- European Regional Development Fund
ESF	- European Social Fund
ESIB	- National Union of Students in Europe
ETF	European Training Foundation
ETQA	- Education & Training Quality Assurance Bodies (South Africa)
EU	- European Union
EUA	- European University Association
FHEQ	- Framework for Higher Education Qualification Levels (England, Wales & N. Ireland)
GCE	- General Certificate of Education (U.K.)
GCSE	- General Certificate in Secondary Education (England, Wales & N. Ireland)
ICT	- Information and Communication Technology
ICMCH	- Institute of Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage - Heritage Malta
ISCED	- International Standard Classification of Education
KC	- Key Competences
MATSEC Board	- Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate Examination Board
MCVET	- Malta Credit Transfer System in VET
MQC	- Malta Qualifications Council
MQF	- Malta Qualifications Framework
NARIC	- National Academic Recognition Information Centres
NCEA	- National Certificate of Education Act (New Zealand)
NQF	- National Qualifications Framework
NRP	- National Reform Programme
NSB	- National Standards Board (South Africa)
NSSB	- National Skills Standards Board
NVQ	- National Vocational Qualifications (England, Wales & N. Ireland)
OPM	- Office of the Prime Minister
SAQA	- South African Qualifications Authority
SCQF	- Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework
SEC	- Secondary Education Certificate
SGB	- Standards Generating Bodies (South Africa)
SS	- Sectoral Skills
SVQ	- Scottish Vocational Qualifications
UK	- Underpinning Knowledge
UNESCO	- United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organisation
VET	- Vocational Education and Training

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Executive Summary

Background

The education system in Malta has undergone a series of improvements in the past 60 years, with the aim of raising the awareness and capabilities of its citizens in a climate of a changing world. In doing so, the education system has maintained its relevance to the needs of the day. With increasing confidence in the country's ability to determine educational standards based on Malta's own needs, the University of Malta launched the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) in 1994. In 2001, the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology was set up, bringing together a number of separate institutions providing vocational education qualifications and setting up the Information and Communication Technology Institute, as well as a corporate identity for vocational education in Malta.

However, these initiatives, worthy as they are, will not be sufficient in themselves to satisfy all of the country's future needs and guarantee Malta recognition in the European and global environment in which we now operate. It is time to take the next step, which will give us not just give a national identity in Malta's educational world, but will provide international recognition within the European Union/Community and beyond. This next step is the creation of a National Qualifications Framework for Malta.

The NQF

A National Qualifications Framework will draw the above initiatives together as part of a national qualifications system. That will allow the application of a quality assurance process, at the end of which, in partnership with stakeholders, will be possible to:

- locate existing qualifications in the framework
- develop hierarchies of qualifications based on a system of defined levels
- evaluate qualifications for comparability
- complete the framework by addressing and overcoming perceived gaps
- add new qualifications to meet emerging customers' national needs

In the pages that follow, descriptions of eight levels in the NQF are provided along with definitions of key competences, knowledge and skills. Eight broad key competences are identified and described, and illustrative qualifications populate the framework at each of the eight levels, with an exposition of the features and characteristics that place the qualifications at the appropriate level. The framework is then considered from three different viewpoints – by exit point of qualification, by the educational context, and by occupation or profession. The implications for key stakeholders is explored – education and training providers, student bodies, employers and employer organisations, trades unions, professional bodies, and lastly recognition and qualifications information bodies.

The development of a National Qualifications Framework will accord with educational reforms at European level through the Bologna process for harmonisation of higher education architecture and the Copenhagen process for vocational education and training. The outcome of these two initiatives is the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). Implementing the above two processes will provide countries with opportunities to open their educational systems to a much wider world. This will come about with mutual trust and cooperation, closer dialogue with the labour market, greater transparency of qualifications (as witnessed by EUROPASS), reducing barriers to access to qualifications, recognising non-formal and informal learning, and developing credit transfer mechanisms. Underlying these developments is the concept of lifelong learning for the individual which will provide an additional impetus to Europe's drive to secure a competitive advantage in global markets.

The EQF is a reference framework with eight hierarchical levels defined by explanatory descriptions for each level. The descriptions are appropriate to a set of learning outcomes (knowledge, skills and competences) ranging from the outcomes of compulsory education at the first level right through to the most complex outcomes at Level eight, the highest personal, professional, technical and scientific level.

After researching the national frameworks of an international selection of countries, MQC has concluded that an 8-level framework, with a set of features and characteristics to foster trust and recognition, and benchmarked to the EQF, represents the best option for Malta's NQF as it responds to Legal Notice 347/2005 and addresses the National Reform Programme. The Government is committed to implementing inclusive education and training policies, making pathways for participants more attractive, flexible and accessible. This will include making provision for the recognition and certification of informal and non-formal learning as well as formal learning. In parallel with this approach, the Government is likewise committed to responding to new occupational needs, key competences and future skills requirements.

Furthermore, the development by MQC of a glossary of terminology associated with qualifications frameworks (e.g. what we mean by a qualification framework and a qualification system) is a prerequisite to any debate on levels and descriptors of qualifications within a defined framework.

A qualification is described as a package of learning that is deemed worthy of formal recognition in a certificate issued by a competent authority. The package of learning can be as small (e.g. a single unit or module) or as large (eg. the outcome of a three-year full time course) as is deemed necessary by an awarding body. For the definition of a qualifications framework and a qualifications system we can turn to the OECD 2006 publication 'Moving Mountains – the Role of National Qualifications Systems in Promoting Lifelong Learning'. A qualifications framework is defined as an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for levels of learning achieved. A qualifications system, on the other hand, is concerned with all aspects of a country's activities that result in the formal recognition of learning i.e. putting national policy into operation, making institutional arrangements, implementing quality assurance processes and including any other mechanisms that link education and training to the labour market and civil society.

Lastly, there is a detailed Action Plan (for the implementation of the NQF) whose starting point is consultation with stakeholders prior to finalising this document. This document is inspired by MQC's advocacy for parity of esteem between VET and HE provision, progression as well as mobility (of learners and workers) and employability.

1.0 Background

1.1 Major Reforms in Education and Training Malta

Education in Malta has made great strides since the compulsory Education Ordinance of 1946¹ which made primary Education compulsory for all children between the ages of 6 and 14 years. It has since grown in the quality of provision as well as the number of students now receiving primary and secondary as well as post-secondary and higher education.

Major reforms have been implemented since the 1970s. Secondary education for all was introduced in 1970 and University education was made free in 1971. Upper-secondary education was amalgamated into one 'Higher Secondary School' (what was known as sixth form), while teacher training became one Government institution - the 'Malta College of Education'. The 70s also marked the attempt at implementing comprehensive schooling as well as the setting up of trade schools.

The Education Act of 1974² that followed brought about further reforms which enhanced development and innovation in education. These reforms included mainly:

- defining the duties and powers of the Minister of Education;
- introducing the regulation of curricula, syllabi and examinations in state schools;
- establishing the composition, functions and powers of the Advisory Council for Education and the Commission for the Development of Higher Education in Malta;
- confirming that compulsory education was on 'full time' basis and free of charge in state schools; and
- revising the school leaving age from 14 to 16, and establishing compulsory education as being between 6-16 years of age.

The Education Act of 1988³ brought about further changes. It lowered the age of compulsory education to 5 years. It also included non-state educational endeavours within the national all-embracing education system and stipulated a national minimum curriculum⁴ for all school children between the ages of three and sixteen. During the 1990s a comprehensive review of the National Minimum Curriculum led to the publication of the current NMC.

The 1988 Education Act also introduced the concept of decentralisation in educational administration and recognised the professional status of teachers. Teachers were regulated for the first time. Heads of school gained more administrative and financial powers within their schools. The aim of these colleges is to promote better co-ordination and dialogue between the different educational levels. The Foundation for Educational Services (FES) provides programmes promoting literacy and helping children in need of educational help. The Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools, on the other hand, works to upgrade and build schools which benefit today's society and which provide a pleasant and safe learning environment for students. Following a reform for decentralisation⁵ in 2005, schools have been networked to form colleges.

The Matriculation and Secondary Education Certificate (MATSEC) Board was set up in 1991. The SEC examination reflects local educational developments including the promulgation of the Education Act (1988) and a National Minimum Curriculum for the various levels of education. The English certification system of GCE 'O' levels has been replaced in 1994 by the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) offered by the MATSEC Examination Board of the University of Malta. Since 1997 the Matriculation Certificate examination has been introduced at post-secondary level. The MATSEC unit also brought about a reform in upper-secondary education within the general education track.

¹ Ordinance II of 1946 – for making the Primary Education of Children Compulsory upon their Parents and Guardians - in the Malta Government Gazette, Supplement II, to which was also added Ordinance IV (Malta Government Gazette, Supplement 13) – To amend the Compulsory Attendance Act of 1924

² Act XXXIX of 1974 – An Act to consolidate and reform the law relating to Education in Malta, Malta Government Gazette No 12,993 of 1974

³ Act XXIV of 1988 – An Act to consolidate and reform the law relating to Education in Malta, in Malta Government Gazette No 15,010 of 1988

⁴ Ministry of Education (1999), *Creating the Future Together: National Minimum Curriculum*

⁵ Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment (2005), *For All Children to Succeed: A new network organisation for quality education in Malta*

Students are now sitting for a matriculation certificate examination based on two subjects at advanced level and four intermediate ones in lieu of the old three subjects at an advanced level system. The Matriculation Certificate is today the certification required for entry to University.

The number of students pursuing tertiary education at the University of Malta has grown steadily to around a total of 10,000 full-time and part-time students. Even though the number of graduates in science and engineering remains low compared to other countries, the number of female graduates has increased and even slightly surpassed that of males.

At the same time, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) which was set up in 1990, continues to provide training across a large number of areas. There are currently over 113 short courses aimed at improving Malta's workforce at all levels of expertise.

There were also changes in the provision of vocational education. The major investment in upper-secondary vocational education is mainly due to the setting up of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) in 2001 which served to bring together a number of institutes, from the Education Division, the setting up of a new ICT Institute and various other units such as the Support Services Unit, the EUPU Unit and the VVTU. This was done following recommendations made by an ad hoc working group set up by the Ministry of Education as well as the contribution which the ETF⁶ gave to the Malta Professional and Vocational Qualifications Awards Council.

The ETF report identified local needs in vocational education to include the need:

- to set up a national system of qualifications;
- to strengthen the role of social partners;
- to support further involvement of employers;
- to develop training in new economic growth areas; and
- to invest more in the provision of vocational education.

The report recommended that these necessities could be tackled by streamlining all existing provisions for vocational education under a common umbrella within a college.

1.2 Educational Reforms at a European Level

There were also reforms at European level. The Bologna Process was initiated and is still ongoing in the area of Higher Education whereas the Copenhagen process addresses changes in the area of Vocational Education. Both processes are driven by the Lisbon targets to make Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustaining economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion'⁷. These two processes promote further education and training of workers as well as frameworks which allow the recognition of skills and qualifications across countries to facilitate mobility.

1.2.1 The Bologna Process

Launched in 1998, the Bologna Process brought together Ministers responsible for Higher Education from France, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany who signed the 'Sorbonne Declaration'⁸ on the 'harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education system'. In the Sorbonne Declaration, the signatory countries agreed to work towards having:

- a convergence of the overall framework in an open European Higher Education Area (EHEA);
- a common degree level system for undergraduates (Bachelor's degree) and graduates (Master's and Doctorate degree); and
- a common policy to enhance student and teacher mobility, removing obstacles for mobility and improving recognition of degrees and academic qualifications.

⁶ ETF (1999), An Overview of Vocational Education and Training: Malta

⁷ European Commission, (2000), Lisbon Target

⁸ Ministers in Charge of Higher Education of France, Germany, Italy and United Kingdom, (1998), Sorbonne Joint Declaration on the Harmonisation of the Architecture of European Higher Education System, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

In 1999, 29 European Ministers in charge of Higher Education met in Bologna and signed the Bologna Declaration⁹ to lay the basis for establishing a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Malta was among the signatories of the Bologna declaration.

The Bologna Declaration listed 6 key issues:

- Adopting a system of easily readable and comparable degrees;
- Adopting a system of two main cycles (undergraduate/graduate);
- Establishing a system of credits (such as ECTS);
- Promoting mobility by overcoming obstacles;
- Promoting European co-operation in quality assurance; and
- Promoting European Dimension in Higher Education.

Ministers met again in Prague in 2001 to follow up the Bologna Process, to set directions and priorities for the following two years. In the Prague Communiqué Ministers reaffirmed their commitment to the objectives of the Bologna Declaration, and appreciated the active involvement of the European University Association (EUA) and the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB). Ministers took note of the constructive assistance of the European Commission and made comments on the further process with regard to the different objectives of the Bologna Declaration. The Prague Communiqué¹⁰ emphasised the important elements of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) to include life-long Education; the active involvement of students; and the need to enhance the attractiveness and competitiveness of the European Higher Education Area to other parts of the world beyond Europe.

In the Berlin Ministerial meeting of 2003, Ministers of Education further defined three intermediate priorities¹¹ namely:

- quality assurance;
- adoption of a system essentially based on two main cycles; and
- recognition of degrees and periods of study.

The Berlin Ministerial meeting in 2003

Ministers stressed the need to develop mutually shared criteria and methodologies and agreed that by 2005 national quality assurance systems should include:

- a definition of the responsibilities of the bodies and institutions involved;
- an evaluation of programmes or institutions including internal assessment, external review, participation of students and the publication of results; and
- a system of accreditation, certification or comparable procedures, international participation, co-operation and networking.

Ministers asked for an overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area. Degrees should have different defined outcomes. First and second degrees cycle should have different orientations and various profiles in order to accommodate a diversity of individual, academic and labour market needs. Ministers considered it necessary to go beyond the present focus on two main cycles of higher education and to include the doctoral level as the third cycle in the Bologna Process. This was done to promote closer links between the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the European Research Area (ERA). This was the tenth action of the Bologna Process. Ministers charged the Follow-up Group with organised stock-taking in time for the summit in Bergen in May 2005. National reports by each country were published online by the end of January 2005.

The Bergen Communiqué¹² underlined the complementarity between the overarching framework for the EHEA and the broader framework of qualifications for lifelong learning encompassing both general and vocational education. The targets for the work set included progress in:

⁹ Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education, (1999), The Bologna Declaration of 19 June 1999, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

¹⁰ Communiqué of the meeting of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, Towards the European Higher Education Area, Prague, 19th May 2001, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

¹¹ Communiqué of the conference of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, Realising the European Higher Education Area, Berlin, 19th September 2003, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

¹² Communiqué of the conference of the European Ministers in charge of Higher Education, The European Higher Education Area Achieving the goals, Bergen, 19-20th May 2005, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

- the implementation of the standards and guidelines for quality assurance as proposed in the ENQA report;
- the implementation of the national qualifications frameworks for qualifications;
- the awarding and recognition of joint degrees, including at doctoral level; and
- creating opportunities for flexible learning paths in higher education, including procedures for the recognition of higher learning.

The Bologna Process has also influenced Higher Education in Malta. The main important developments within the University of Malta included the replacement of the already existing Credit system with the ECTS system across undergraduate courses except in the case of Medicine and Dentistry¹³. The University of Malta is also issuing the Diploma Supplement (DS) to its graduates and working towards establishing the DS across all courses. It has also worked towards strengthening its internal quality assurance system through the Quality Assurance Committee. Three legal notices have also been promulgated to amend the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Act (Act No. XVIII of 2002)¹⁴. These included an amendment to:

- the Mutual Recognition of Professional Education and Training Regulations;
- the Mutual Recognition of Professional Activities; and
- the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information and the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Board Regulations.

The Act catered for the setting up in 2002 of the Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre which has the function of evaluating diplomas, providing assistance in the comparative analysis and evaluation of diplomas, collecting and disseminating information about professional and vocational qualifications, promoting the recognition of Maltese qualifications abroad, facilitating mobility of professionals, and promoting transparency of qualifications. Annex VII includes the Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications¹⁵ and lists the possible qualifications within the European Union that are recognised for specified professions. In 2005 a new legal notice was published establishing the Malta Qualifications Council¹⁶. Legal Notice 347 replaced Legal Notice 215 of 2000. The remit of the Malta Qualifications Council is to steer the development of the National Qualifications Framework and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the Framework and which is not already provided for at compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies. This legal notice falls under the Employment and Training Services Act¹⁷.

1.2.2 The Copenhagen Process

The Copenhagen Process was initiated in November 2002 at a meeting in the Danish capital to agree a Declaration on enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET)¹⁸. It continues to set political priorities for achieving the Lisbon objectives in the field of vocational education, within the context of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. The 'Education and Training 2010 Work Programme'¹⁹ is a result of an agreement between Ministers of Education who, in 2001, adopted a report on the future objectives of education and training systems based on shared objectives to be achieved by 2010. The Education Council and the European Commission in 2002 endorsed a 10-year work programme. This work programme is based on three major goals to be achieved by 2010 for the benefit of the citizens and the EU as a whole, and which include:

- The quality and effectiveness of the EU education and training systems; and
- Opening up education and training to the wider world.

¹³ Bologna Process National Report: Malta, 2005, <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/>

¹⁴ Government of Malta, Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Act (Act XVIII of 2002)

¹⁵ Government of Malta, Mutual Recognition of Professional Qualifications, 2006

¹⁶ Government of Malta, Legal Notice 347, 2005

¹⁷ Government of Malta, Employment and Training Services Act, Chapter 343, Act XXVIII of 1990 as amended by Acts XV of 1995, Act XVI of 1997, Act II of 2005 and Act VII of 2006

¹⁸ Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training, and the European Commission, convened in Copenhagen on 29 and 30 November 2002, on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training "The Copenhagen Declaration" http://ec.europa.eu/education/copenhagen/copenhagen_declaration_en.pdf

¹⁹ See website http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html

The Education and Training programme targets thirteen specific objectives related to various types and levels of education and training (formal, non-formal and informal). These targets aim to support lifelong learning and include, mainly: teacher training; basic skills; integration of Information and Communication Technologies; efficiency of investments; language learning; lifelong guidance; flexibility of the systems to make learning accessible to all, mobility, citizenship education, etc. Working Groups, involving experts and other stakeholders, have been working on one or more objectives of the work programme. Their role is to support the implementation of the objectives for education and training systems at national level through exchanges of 'good practices', study visits, peer reviews, etc.

The Copenhagen Process is an integrated part of the Education and Training 2010 programme and the Lisbon strategy in which VET must be developed to play its active and key role in furthering lifelong learning policies and supplying the highly skilled workforce necessary to make Europe one of the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economies and societies in the world. The main aims of the Copenhagen Process are the development of lifelong learning and the promotion of mutual trust between the key players. It is an accelerated measure to improve the quality and attractiveness of VET, which is lagging behind other fields of education, and to raise the parity of esteem between them.

The main objectives set by the Copenhagen declaration are:

- establishing a single framework for transparency of qualifications and competences;
- promoting cooperation in quality assurance in VET;
- developing a credit transfer system for VET - a system that enables individuals to progressively obtain credit points based on the competences they acquire along their vocational learning route, in both formal and informal settings;
- strengthening policies, systems and practices for lifelong guidance;
- supporting the development of qualifications and competences at sectoral level; and
- giving attention to the learning needs of teachers and trainers

Technical working groups and expert groups were established by the European Commission to develop common European references and principles aimed at supporting Member States' policies in the fields of quality, transparency and recognition. The results achieved since 2002 include:

- the development of the **Europass** – a single framework for transparency of qualifications and competences – launched in 2005;
- a Council Resolution on strengthening policies, systems and practices in the field of guidance throughout life, which brings a coherent approach to this topic across education and training sectors at Community and national levels;
- Council conclusions on the 'identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning' that endorse a set of common European principles to help develop confidence and trust in this rapidly emerging sector;
- Council Conclusions on Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training, which endorse a Common Quality Assurance Framework for VET providers and systems; and
- a basic design and the way forward for the implementation of a European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET) presented at the follow-up meeting in Maastricht in 2004.

The Maastricht Communiqué²⁰ makes reference to priorities for reform in key areas. These priorities include the need to mobilise the necessary investments effectively and to focus on the development of key competences of citizens throughout life. The document states that necessary reforms and investment should be focused particularly on:

- the image and attractiveness of the vocational route for employers and individuals, in order to increase participation in VET;
- achieving high levels of quality and innovation in VET systems in order to benefit all learners and make European VET globally competitive;
- linking VET with the labour market requirements of the knowledge economy for a highly skilled workforce, and especially, due to the strong impact of demographic change, the upgrading and competence development of older workers;
- considering the needs of low-skilled (about 80 million persons aged between 25-64 years in the EU) and disadvantaged groups for the purpose of achieving social cohesion and increasing labour market participation.

²⁰ Ministers responsible for Vocational Education and Training, Maastricht Communiqué on the Future Priorities of Enhanced European Cooperation in Vocational Education and Training (VET), 14th December 2004, Maastricht

The Maastricht Communiqué stresses the need to foster innovative strategies and instruments at the national and European levels, such as designing VET systems which attract more students to higher qualifications. It lists priorities at a national level to include:

- the use of common instruments to support the reform and development of VET systems and practices, guidance, quality assurance and identification and validation of non-formal and informal learning;
- improving public and/or private investment in VET;
- using the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund to support the development of VET;
- further developing VET systems to meet the needs of people or groups at risk of labour market and social exclusion, in particular early school leavers, low skilled, migrants, persons with disabilities and the unemployed;
- developing and implementing open learning approaches, enabling people to define individual pathways, supported by appropriate guidance and counselling, complemented by the establishment of flexible and open frameworks for VET in order to reduce barriers between VET and general education, and increase progression between initial and continuing training and higher education;
- increasing relevance and quality of VET through the systematic involvement of all key partners in developments at national, regional and local level, particularly regarding quality assurance;
- further developing learning-conducive environments in training institutions and at the workplace. This entails enhancing and implementing pedagogical approaches which support self-organised learning and utilise the potential provided by ICT and e-learning;
- continuing competence development of teachers and trainers in VET, according to their specific learning needs and changing role as a consequence of developments in VET.

The Maastricht Communiqué also sets out priorities at European level. It confirms the consolidation of priorities of the Copenhagen process through the development of an open and flexible European qualifications framework, founded on transparency and mutual trust, facilitating the recognition and transferability of qualifications covering both VET and general (secondary and higher) education, based mainly on competences and learning outcomes. It also argues in favour of improving permeability within education and training systems, providing a reference for the validation of informally acquired competences. There should be support for smooth and effective functioning of the European, national and sectoral labour markets through a framework underpinned by a set of common reference levels, and supported by instruments agreed at European level, particularly quality assurance mechanisms to create the necessary mutual trust. The Communiqué also refers to the development and implementation of the European credit transfer system for VET (ECVET) in order to allow learners to build upon the achievements resulting from their learning pathways when moving between learning systems. The need to examine the specific learning needs and changing role of vocational teachers and trainers is highlighted. It also contains emphasis on the need for improvement of the scope, precision and reliability of VET statistics in order to enable evaluation of progress in making VET efficient, effective and attractive. Adequate data and indicators are the key to understanding what is happening in VET and what additional interventions and decision-making are required by all parties involved.

The Helsinki Communiqué (December 2006) was a follow up to the Copenhagen and Maastricht declarations. An overview of the agreed strategies vis-à-vis vocational education and training appears in MQC's draft working document Vol.2 on a *VET System for Malta's NQF*.

1.2.3 The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)

The European Qualifications Framework (EQF)²¹ is the result of both the Copenhagen and Bologna Processes which highlighted the need for an instrument to act as a translation device and neutral reference point to compare qualifications and to facilitate their transparency, comparability and transfer throughout Europe. It also aims to act as a catalyst, bringing about reforms in national education and training systems with the aim of promoting lifelong learning²².

²¹ European Commission, The European Qualifications Framework: a new way to understand qualifications across Europe, IP/06/1148 Brussels, 5 September 2006, http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/eqf/index_en.html

²² insert reference of document on lifelong learning

Lifelong learning currently faces barriers between institutions, systems and countries which prevent learners from access and choice for further learning. Qualifications frameworks open up access to learning experiences, clarify progression routes and facilitate the validation of non-formal learning as well as a better match of qualifications to knowledge, skills and competences. The EQF aims to provide transparency, comparability and transfer of qualifications in order to promote mobility. The EQF is thus a measure to achieve the Lisbon goals and follows the recommendation of the joint reports of the Council and the Commission on the implementation of the Education and Training 2010 Work Programme. The EQF was consequently proposed under articles 149 and 150 due to its dual role encompassing both education and training objectives as well as those for achieving lifelong learning.

The EQF aims to act as a meta-framework enabling national and sectoral frameworks and systems to relate and compare to each other. Such a framework will promote and facilitate the transfer, transparency and recognition of qualifications. It also serves to provide mutual trust between the different stakeholders involved in the lifelong process. The EQF is conceptualised to perform the following specific functions:

- establishing a common reference point which through learning outcomes and levels of competence will enable better understanding of the training provided offered by providers to learners;
- acting as a translation device enabling the comparison of learning outcomes and level of learning;
- providing a common reference point for quality assurance and development in education and training;
- providing a reference point for the development of sectoral qualifications but also allowing interconnections, synergies and overlaps; and
- promoting changes at European, national and sectoral level within a lifelong learning perspective.

The EQF will enable citizens to navigate between complex education systems and locate the levels of their learning outcomes. It will also provide support to authorities and institutions and other training providers to identify and position the learning outcomes of their training on the EQF. The EQF also simplifies the process of recognition of qualifications between sectors and countries across the EU as well as outside the EU.

The EQF provides a common methodological and conceptual approach supporting reform at national level. The EQF leads to the development of national and sectoral qualifications frameworks for lifelong education.

The EQF includes a set of reference points described in hierarchical levels spanning the full range of qualifications from compulsory education to the most advanced qualification for senior professionals including qualifications acquired through non-formal and informal learning and through lifelong opportunities. The EQF is built on 8 different reference points. The European Commission services' expert group has advised that qualifications at each level in the EQF should be described in terms of three types of learning outcomes: knowledge; skills; and wider competences described as personal and professional outcomes. The three types of learning outcomes reflect progression in all three aspects. They are described at each level of the framework in a way that facilitates amplification and exemplification by national and sectoral bodies.

Each level of the EQF does not have details of specific qualifications or systems that operate in particular countries or sectors. It, however, allows national and sectoral experts and competent bodies to peg national qualifications to the EQF. It is a task of each Member State, national authorities and sectoral bodies and training providers to review existing qualifications and programmes and to ensure that they can be understood as learning-outcomes qualifications. This will make it possible to peg national qualifications to the National Qualifications Framework, aligned to the EQF meta-framework. This is the aim of this document.

The European Commission has, on 5th September 2006, adopted a proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. On the 29th September 2006 the European Parliament adopted by 535 votes to 18, with 10 abstentions, the EQF based on the report by Thomas Mann on the creation of a European Qualifications Framework. Mr. Mann is

quoted to state that ‘with the help of the EQF, many barriers should be removed and employees and employers able to make better use of their skills. Mobility between the Member States and various systems of education should be made easier’²³. The Mann report highlights the lack of clear link with the labour market and emphasises that it should focus more on applicants’ employability. The report also stresses that the framework can only become fully effective if qualifications are listed according to appropriateness, and so ‘must take into account not only formal diplomas but also the informal and non-formal qualifications, in particular professional experience and the wider aspects of competence’²⁴. It also recommends that descriptors be reviewed not only taking account of and retaining the Bologna criteria associated with university education, but completing them by taking greater account of other systems of education and vocational training.

²³ Mann Report on European Qualifications Framework Adopted, Agency Europe, Extract 27, 10/03/2006

²⁴ Ibid.

Table 1: Descriptors defining levels in the European Qualifications Framework²⁵

Level	Knowledge (<i>theoretical and/or factual</i>)	Skills (<i>cognitive-logical, intuitive and creative thinking, practical-manual dexterity, use of methods, materials, tools and instruments</i>)	Competence (<i>responsibility and autonomy</i>)
1	Basic general knowledge	Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks	Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context
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 to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools	Work or study under supervision with some autonomy
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
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 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

²⁵ EQF Level descriptors as revised in Q3 of 2006

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
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
7	Highly specialised knowledge, some of which is at the forefront 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
8	Knowledge at the most advanced frontier of a field of work 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 and to extend and redefine 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

2.0 Benchmarking Malta

The concept of benchmarking originates from the practice of surveyors' work that uses a permanent reference point against which they can compare and measure levels. Jackson and Lund²⁶ identify various forms of benchmarking, having developmental, regulatory, implicit/explicit, independent/collaborative, internally/externally focused purposes. They argue that the process can be vertical or horizontal, qualitative or quantitative. Benchmarking can be done against descriptors, specifications, or examples of practice. Benchmarking in education can be used to compare and evaluate curricula frameworks, learning outcomes, assessment practices and regulations, departmental performance, degree performance, the learning environment, quality management systems, the student experience, student recruitment, the learning infrastructure.

During an ENQA workshop²⁷ on benchmarking, definitions of benchmarking were categorised in three main types: *practical definitions* which describe what benchmarking is and what activities it includes; *existential* which try to connect benchmarking with experiences and emotions, and *metaphorical*. A difference between 'true' and 'false' benchmarking also emerged. 'True' benchmarking tends to be improvement-oriented involving negotiation, collaboration, and mutual understanding. People learn from each other through dialogue. On the contrary, 'false' benchmarking tends to be rank-oriented and not interested in improving practice. During this seminar, benchmarking space was considered to emanate between the sources and quality cultures. The sources provide the reasons and agents for benchmarking. Quality cultures construct the social context. The outcomes and results of the benchmarking process will create changes on the quality cultures which, in turn, have impact on the sources. This circle is repeated again as part of the benchmarking process. It is evident from the representation below that benchmarking is multifaceted and complex. However, it can offer interaction and stimulus which are important for a meaningful learning process leading to improvement in any system.

SOURCES						
Owner	External		Internal		Shared	Customer
Interest	To qualify	To compare	To improve	To win	To cooperate	Energy
Seeking for	Standards	Benchmarks	Better practices	Best practices	Joint topics	Target
Process	Ranking	accreditation	Comparing		Learning	Style
Outcome	Quality prizes	Certificates	Cooperation development competition		Alliance	Results
QUALITY CULTURES						

Figure 1: Benchmarking space as developed in ENQA workshop 'Benchmarking in the Improvement of Higher Education'

Benchmarking is a powerful vehicle for quality improvement. It seeks to assess the achievements, shortcomings, and environments, often in comparison with peer systems, and to identify strategies for improvement and innovation. A National Qualifications Framework for Malta thus needs to be benchmarked, not only to the European Qualifications Framework, but also to other National Qualifications systems across the world. Benchmarking the NQF will allow comparison of the local system to other established qualification frameworks, assuring standards and quality, but also providing the opportunity to improve and learn from others.

²⁶ Jackson, N, and Lund, H (Eds), *Benchmarking for Higher Education*, Open University Press, Buckingham, (2000).

²⁷ ENQA Workshop Reports (2003), *Benchmarking in the Improvement of Higher Education*

2.1 A review of different National Qualifications Systems

Many countries have different systems of qualifications, often encompassed within frameworks. Frameworks are devices that support coordination, correspondence, integration and harmonisation of different systems. Frameworks are in some countries comprehensive and include all sectors of education and training, that is, one framework for both vocational and academic education²⁸. Some countries have different frameworks for restricted areas, that is, often a separate one for each of the academic and vocational strands.

Framework development has been most comprehensive mainly in a number of Commonwealth countries, these being: the United Kingdom; Australia; New Zealand and South Africa. Each of these countries has formally developed and published a main national framework of qualifications. On the other hand, many continental European countries tend to have a differentiated sector of education and training and consequently tend to have parallel frameworks for professional/vocational and academic education. This tends to be the case in the Netherlands, Germany, Spain and France. The United States has a different approach where qualifications are given minimal legal protection. Public interest protection is found, however, with respect to the licence to practise²⁹. The closest example to a quasi-framework is the National Skills Standards Board (NSSB) which influences the system through regulation, planning and co-ordination of publicly-funded institutions.

2.1.1 The Australian Qualifications Framework³⁰

The Australian Qualifications Framework (commonly known as the AQF) is a unified system of national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training and the higher education sector (mainly universities). The qualifications in Australia include:

- The senior Certificate of Education;
- Certificate I;
- Certificate II;
- Certificate III;
- Certificate IV;
- Diploma;
- Advanced Diploma, Associate Degree;
- Bachelor's Degree;
- Vocational Graduate Certificate;
- Vocational Graduate Diploma;
- Graduate Certificate;
- Graduate Diploma;
- Master's Degree;
- Doctoral Degree.

The Framework links together all these qualifications and is a highly visible, quality-assured national system of educational recognition which promotes lifelong learning and a seamless and diverse education and training system. The AQF was introduced Australia-wide in January 1995 and was phased in over five years, with full implementation by the year 2000. The AQF was developed under instruction from State, Territory and Commonwealth Education and Training Ministers meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). MCEETYA has established an AQF Advisory Board to protect the AQF qualifications guidelines and to promote and monitor national implementation of the AQF.

²⁸ National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, *National Practices and Trends in the Classification or Grading of Awards in Further Education and Training and Higher Education and Training: Research Findings*, 2001

²⁹ *ibid*

³⁰ <http://www.aqf.edu.au/>

AQF Qualification by Sector of Accreditation

Schools Sector Accreditation	Vocational Education and Training Sector Accreditation	Higher Education Sector Accreditation
Senior Secondary Certificate of Education	<u>Vocational Graduate Diploma</u> <u>Vocational Graduate Certificate</u> <u>Advanced Diploma</u> <u>Diploma</u> <u>Certificate IV</u> <u>Certificate III</u> <u>Certificate II</u> <u>Certificate I</u>	<u>Doctoral Degree</u> <u>Master's Degree</u> <u>Graduate Diploma</u> <u>Graduate Certificate</u> <u>Bachelor's Degree</u> <u>Associate Degree</u> <u>Advanced Diploma</u> <u>Diploma</u>

Figure 2: Australia's Qualifications Framework

In Australia, work-based qualifications and academic qualifications are now part of a single system, allowing maximum flexibility in career planning and continuous learning. The AQF helps all learners, employers and education and training providers to participate and navigate the qualifications system. Under the AQF, one can start at the level that suits him/her and then build up as needs and interests develop and change over time. The Framework assists learners to plan their career progression at whatever stage they are within their lives and when they are moving interstate and overseas.

The AQF works to provide nationally consistent recognition of outcomes achieved in post-compulsory education. It helps with developing flexible pathways which assist people to move more easily between education and training sectors and between those sectors and the labour market by providing the basis for recognition of prior learning, including credit transfer and work and life experience. It integrates and streamlines the requirements of participating providers, employers and employees, individuals and interested organisations, while offering flexibility to suit the diversity of purposes of education and training. It encourages individuals to progress through the levels of education and training by improving access to qualifications, clearly defining avenues for achievement, and generally contributing to lifelong learning. It also encourages the provision of more and higher quality vocational education and training through qualifications that normally meet workplace requirements and vocational needs, thus contributing to national economic performance. It also serves to promote national and international recognition of qualifications offered in Australia.

2.1.2 The South African Qualifications Framework³¹

The South African Qualifications Framework (SAQF) was established in 1995 with the enactment of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act. The Framework attempts to rectify the fragmented and segregated education and training system that previously existed by adopting a single and integrated qualifications system. The general concept of building a coherent and integrated system with more equitable access and improved levels of outcomes is seen as part of the process of reconciliation and rebuilding after the apartheid era.

The SAQA Act 1995 sets out the objectives for developing a national qualifications framework. The objectives of the South African National Qualifications Framework include:

- Creating an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- Facilitating access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- Enhancing the quality of education and training;

³¹ <http://www.saqa.org.za/>

- Accelerating the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- Contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.

The NQF consists of eight levels, which are entitled Levels 1 to 8. Each level is described by a unique level descriptor. Level 1 of the National Qualifications Framework is open-ended and accommodates three sub-levels for Adult Basic Education and Training for which certificates of achievement may be awarded, and level 8 is open-ended. The eight levels of the NQF are grouped into three bands, which can be defined as follows:

Level 1 and below: General Education and Training band;

Levels 2 to 4: Further Education and Training band;

Levels 5 to 8: Higher Education and Training band.

South Africa has National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) which are responsible for managing qualifications. There are twelve NSBs for each qualification field of NQF, and these twelve fields are formulated from a standard-setting point of view. Each field is subdivided by industry and job category and sub-fields are formed. SGBs are created in each sub-field and are responsible for generating standards and for making recommendations to NSBs. An NSB is not a standard generating body but rather plays a monitoring role for its field.

NQF LEVEL	BAND	QUALIFICATION TYPE	
8	HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	• Post-doctoral research degrees	
7		• Doctorates	
6		• Masters degrees	
5		• Professional Qualifications	
		• Honours degrees	
		• National first degrees	
		• Higher diplomas	
		• National diplomas	
		• National certificates	
FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATES			
4	FURTHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING	• National certificates	
3			
2			
GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING CERTIFICATES			
I	GENERAL EDUCATION AND TRAINING	Grade 9	ABET Level 4
		• National certificates	

Figure 3: South African Qualifications Framework³²

The twelve organising fields include:

- Field 01: Agriculture and Nature Conservation
- Field 02: Culture and Arts
- Field 03: Business, Commerce and Management Studies
- Field 04: Communication Studies and Language
- Field 05: Education, Training and Development
- Field 06: Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology
- Field 07: Human and Social Studies
- Field 08: Law, Military Science and Security
- Field 09: Health Sciences and Social Services

³² South African Qualifications Authority, 2003c

- Field 10: Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences
- Field 11: Services
- Field 12: Physical Planning and Construction

The quality assurance system in South Africa is organized by Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs), which are accredited by SAQA, and learning providers, which are accredited by ETQA. ETQAs are structured in three sectors which are the economic sector, the social sector and the education and training sub-system sector. These ETQAs sustain the quality of learning outcomes and standards by registering assessors and by accrediting providers. Accredited providers are responsible for their learning programmes. ETQAs evaluate assessment and make recommendations to NSBs on new qualifications and modifications to existing qualifications.

The New Zealand Qualifications Framework³³

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in New Zealand is designed to provide nationally recognised, consistent standards and qualifications as well as recognition and credit for all learning of knowledge and skills in the country. All NQF qualifications are quality assured and nationally recognised. Administered by the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, the NQF is a way of structuring national qualifications.

New Zealand's NQF is a three-pronged quality system where: national standards are registered; used by accredited organisations; and a moderation system ensures national consistency. The NQF was developed through a two-year process of policy development and public consultation in 1990-1991.

The New Zealand NQF was designed to achieve a range of interlinked objectives, these being to:

- create a single, co-ordinated framework of qualifications;
- provide a consistent basis for the recognition of educational achievement wherever that achievement occurs;
- extend recognition to a wide range of achievements;
- encourage the integration of 'academic skills' with applied skills, and to bring together theory and practice;
- enable and encourage diversity among providers of education and training, and to recognise academic freedom;
- reform assessment practices in education and training;
- raise progressively the standards of educational achievement;
- shift the practice of teaching to student-centred learning;
- provide quality assurance for qualifications;
- enable qualifications to evolve and develop;
- recognise the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi;
- provide a rational system of nomenclature for qualifications;
- provide a system of credit accumulation and transfer;
- enable qualifications that are flexible;
- encourage a wider range of educational settings; and
- provide incentives to increase individual and collective investment in education and training.

The NQF consists of ten levels as part of the development of the criteria for the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications (the Register). These levels allow learners, education providers, employers and the general public to accurately recognise and distinguish higher levels of achievement in postgraduate qualifications. Qualifications on the NQF are based on 'units of learning' with a standard format and a national catalogue. Since 1993, the units of learning have been known as 'unit standards'. In 2001, the NQF was further developed to allow the registration of 'achievement standards' for school subjects. The NQF is intended to lead to the development of unit standards and qualifications for sectors and disciplines that previously had no qualifications. A Record of Learning (RoL) is kept for all learners gaining credit on the NQF, with

³³ <http://www.nzqa.govt.nz/>

the Qualifications Authority being responsible for maintaining the RoL in a central computer database. Every learner gaining credits on the NQF receives a RoL that lists all the NQF standards and qualifications they have achieved regardless of where she/he has achieved them.

Qualifications can be registered at one of ten levels on the NQF. The level depends on the complexity of the skills and knowledge that are being recognised. Level 1 is the least complex and is open-ended downward to capture all learning. Level 10 is the most complex. The levels do not equate to 'years spent learning' but reflect the content of the qualification. Levels 1 to 3 are equivalent to Forms 5 to 7 (or years 11 to 13), foundation skills, and introductory trades training. Initial trade certificates are normally at Level 3 to 4, advanced trades, technical and business qualifications are normally at Level 5 to 7, and graduate and post-graduate qualifications are at Level 7 and above. The following qualifications are available on the NQF.

10	Doctorate		
9	Masters		
8	Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates, Bachelors with Honours		
7	Bachelors Degree		
	Graduate		
	Diplomas		
6	Diplomas		
5			
4	Certificates		
3			
2			
1			

Figure 4: Qualifications available on the New Zealand NQF

The Ministry of Education develops all achievement standards. Credit from achievement standards can be used towards the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA) at Level 1, 2 or 3, as well as a number of other qualifications on the NQF. Achievement standards differ from unit standards in that they have three grades of achievement (achievement, achievement with merit, and achievement with excellence), and the majority are supported by curriculum statements and learning materials. Unit standards can have two grades of attainment, credit and merit, although, in practice, most industries choose to develop standards that recognise only credit. A very small number of unit standards have been presented for registration with a merit as well as a credit grade.

The classification system for the NQF is a hierarchy with three tiers, from most general to most specific, called field, subfield, and domain. The NQF classification system is used to classify standards, to classify and title qualifications, and to provide the scope for accreditation of organisations to deliver training and assessment against NQF standards. There are 17 fields, each with subfields:

Agriculture, Forestry and Fisheries
Arts and Crafts
Business
Community and Social Services
Computing and Information Technology
Core Generic
Education
Engineering and Technology
Health

Humanities
Law and Security
Manufacturing
Maori
Planning and Construction
Sciences
Service Sector
Social Sciences

One of the most significant advances in New Zealand's qualifications system in recent years was the development of the Register (the New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications), which was fully implemented on 1 August 2006. The comprehensive listing of qualifications on the Register is a powerful tool for learners and the public to access information on, and make comparisons between, qualifications. All qualifications, including university qualifications and all other quality assured local qualifications, are represented on the Register in terms of title, level, credits, outcome statements, and subject classification.

2.1.4 The National Qualifications Frameworks in the U.K. (England, Wales and N. Ireland³⁴, Scotland, and Ireland)

England, Wales and N. Ireland

The National Qualifications Framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland sets out the levels at which qualifications can be recognised. It helps learners to make informed decisions on the qualifications they need, by comparing the levels of different qualifications and identifying clear progression routes to their career.

The original NQF has been revised and changes to the NQF took effect from 1st September 2004. The number of levels was increased from 6 to 9 (entry level to level 8). The changes do not alter the content and number of qualifications available, but increase the number of levels against which they are accredited. The increased number of NQF levels does not mean that learners take more qualifications, as different progression routes do not involve taking qualifications at every level. The revised NQF levels also allow a broad comparison with the Framework for Higher Education Qualification levels (FHEQ).

³⁴ <http://www.qca.org.uk/>
<http://www.openquals.org.uk/>

National Qualifications Framework	Framework for Higher Education Qualifications	European HE Area Cycle/typical credits
8 Highly Specialist awards from a professional body	D (doctoral) Doctorates	Third cycle (540 where appropriate)
7 NVQ Level 7 Diploma Level 7 fellowship Level 7 advanced professional Certificate	M (masters) Masters degrees, Postgraduate Diplomas and Certificates	Second cycle (180/120/60)
6 Level 6 Diploma NVQ Level 6 diploma	H (honours) Bachelors Degrees with Honours, Graduate Diplomas and Certificates	First cycle (360)
5 Level 5 BTEC Level 5 NVQ Higher National Diploma Level 5	I (intermediate) Diplomas of Higher Education and Further Education, Foundation Degrees, Higher National Diplomas	Short cycle (240)
4 Higher National Diploma Level 4 Certificate Level 4 BTEC Level 4 diploma	C (certificate) Certificates of Higher Education	(120)
3 Level 3 Certificate Level 3 NVQ A levels	Entry to each level of the Framework for Higher Education Qualifications is possible from the next lower level in the National Qualifications Framework or Framework for Higher Education Qualifications for students with the necessary pre-requisites. Typically one undergraduate academic year is 120 credits (compare ECTS: 60 credits)	Entry
2 Level 2 Diploma Level 2 NVQ GCSEs Grades A*-C		
1 Level 1 Certificate Level 1 NVQ GCSEs Grades D-G		
Entry Entry Level Certificate in Adult Literacy		

Figure 5: NQF for England, Wales and Northern Ireland³⁵

³⁵ National Recognition Information Centre for the United Kingdom (UK NARIC), Version 3, 17 February 2005

Scotland

Scotland has its own 12 level system, the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF)³⁶, which is in use by all education establishments in Scotland and the Open University. The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) is the national credit transfer system for all levels of qualifications in Scotland. It incorporates the Scottish Qualifications Certificate, the Higher National Certificate, the Higher National Diploma, the Scottish Vocational Qualification (SVQ) (equivalent to National Vocational Qualification - NVQ) and all degrees of Scottish Higher Education Institutions. It is managed by the Scottish Qualifications Council Scottish Qualifications Authority, the Quality Assurance Authority Scotland and Universities Scotland.

SCQF Level	SQA National Units, Courses and Group Awards	Higher Education	Scottish Vocational Qualifications (SVQ)
12		Doctorate	
11		Masters' degree	SVQ 5
10		Honours degree, Graduate diploma	
9		Ordinary degree, Graduate certificate	
8		HND, DipHE	SVQ 4
7	Advanced Higher	HNC, CertHE	
6	Higher		SVQ 3
5	Intermediate 2 Credit Standard Grade		SVQ 2
4	Intermediate 1 General Standard Grade		SVQ 1
3	Access 3 Foundation Standard Grade		SVQ 1
2	Access 2		
1	Access 1		

Figure 6: The Scottish National Qualifications Framework

The Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework (SCQF) was developed to meet the needs of Scotland's learners and was created by bringing together all Scottish mainstream qualifications into a single unified framework. It was developed in partnership by the Scottish Qualifications Authority, Universities Scotland, Quality Assurance Agency Scotland and the Scottish Executive and was launched in December 2001.

The aims of the SCQF are to:

- assist people of all ages and circumstances to access appropriate education and training over their lifetime to fulfil their personal, social and economic potential; and
- enable employers, learners and the public in general to understand the full range of Scottish qualifications, how they relate to each other and how different types of qualifications can contribute to improving the skills of the workforce.

The SCQF also helps describe programmes of learning that lead to the various qualifications. It supports the development of routes to progress from qualification to qualification, and maximises the opportunities to transfer credit points between qualifications. It does this by making the overall system of qualifications and relevant programmes of learning easier to understand and by providing a national vocabulary for describing learning opportunities.

³⁶ <http://www.scqf.org.uk/>

Ireland

The National Framework of Qualifications for Ireland³⁷, the NFQ was proposed through the Qualifications (Education and Training) Act 1999 and launched in 2003. It is a system of ten levels that incorporates awards made for all kinds of learning, wherever it is gained. The NFQ, through its ten levels, provides a means of comparing and contrasting national and international education and training qualifications. It helps learners to plan their education and training and employers to identify the qualifications they require.

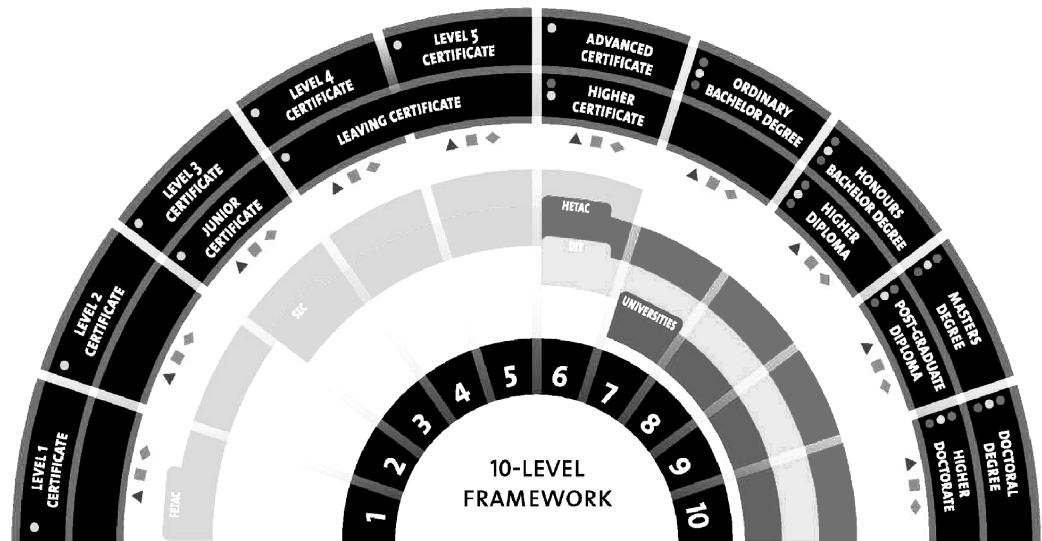


Figure 7: Qualifications Level for Ireland³⁸

As the NFQ is designed to recognise both large and smaller packages of learning, it was necessary to ensure that more than one type of award was designed. The NFQ has four award-types, they are:

- Major Awards : the principal class of award made at a level
- Minor Awards : for partial completion of the outcomes for a Major Award
- Supplemental Awards : for learning that is additional to a Major Award
- Special Purpose Awards: for relatively narrow or purpose-specific achievement.

The National Qualifications Authority of Ireland, in consultation with further and higher education and training stakeholders, published the Major Award type descriptors for each level of the NFQ in 2003. The purpose of these descriptors was to identify the standard of knowledge, skill and competence appropriate to each level on the NFQ.

2.1.5 The ISCED levels

The highest level authoritative overview of international systems is that produced by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) which designed the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) levels. Although it was mainly designed for the purpose of collecting and comparing data, it shares two features common to qualifications frameworks: a specification of levels; and a specification of fields of study. There are 7 main ISCED levels, ranging from pre-primary education to second stage tertiary education leading to a research qualification (see table below).

Table 2: Description of ISCED levels

Level	Name of Level
6	Second stage of Tertiary Education (leading to an advanced research qualification)
5	First stage of tertiary education (not leading directly to an advanced research qualification)
4	Post-secondary non-tertiary education
3	Upper Secondary Education
2	Lower Education (second stage of basic education)
1	Primary Education (first stage of basic education)
0	Pre-primary Level

³⁷ <http://www.nfq.ie/>

³⁸ *ibid.*

2.2 Why is it necessary to benchmark Malta's National Qualifications Framework?

It is only possible to benchmark one's outcomes and standards achieved by comparing to a similar type of performance elsewhere. It is thus necessary for qualifications issued in Malta to be comparable to other similar types of qualifications in other countries. Such benchmarking is necessary to ensure quality assurance in education and training provision. Looking at other examples of good practice will help Malta evaluate the quality of its work as well as work towards improving provision. Benchmarking is also necessary to enable the comparability of qualifications, facilitating and promoting labour force mobility.

Within the European Union, the National Qualifications Framework needs to be benchmarked against the European Qualifications Framework (EQF). It is a national responsibility to define how national qualification structures should relate to the EQF levels. This will facilitate transfer and comparability. The procedures for inclusion of qualifications in the framework should be transparent and arrangements for quality assurance need to be consistent with those developed within the Bologna and Copenhagen Processes.

The National Qualifications Framework serves the purpose of self-certification. It is the instrument through which the country will certify the comparability of its qualifications with the EQF. It is important that the evidence supporting the self-certification process should be based on specific criteria which are published and a formal record of the decisions and arrangements related to the framework kept. The whole process would also need to be validated by external experts for quality assurance purposes. Such benchmarking would require the participation of other main stakeholders such as the ENIC and NARIC networks, the NRP network and the Network of National Europass Centres.

3.0 General Policy Context

Malta faces a number of challenges in education. The National Reform Programme³⁹ outlines Malta's measures in aiming to achieve the Lisbon targets. In the case of education, it identifies the problems which make up the country's main challenges to include:

- A high rate of persons without a higher level of secondary education;
- A high percentage of early school leavers⁴⁰;
- Strong segmentations and fragmentation between formal, informal and non-formal training in VET education;
- The low number of persons over the age of 15 attending education or training; and
- A low participation in lifelong learning, particularly by low-skilled workers.

The document highlights the need that as yet no legal framework for vocational education exists that outlines the setting up of National Standards on VET provisions. This statement is consistent with the government's statements made in the 2006 pre-budget⁴¹ document where one finds reference to qualifications in three instances. These are:

- **Upgrading workforce skills:** where one finds a reference to the need to establish a framework for national vocational qualifications so as to put vocational education on a sound and better structured footing for the benefit of both students and employers⁴²;
- **Sustaining participation in higher education:** which sets the target of 65% of 22 year olds having a least upper secondary education qualifications as declared in the National Action Plan: Employment of 2004⁴³;
- **Adult Education and Training:** In promoting the up-skilling of workers by part-time education, government emphasises again the need for a national vocational qualifications framework which would bring increased clarity to the meaning of different types of qualifications and would also allow qualifications to be compared easily. The framework should also allow for a wider access to awards, creating additional opportunities for transfer to different programmes and encouraging learners to progress to tertiary education⁴⁴.

It also emphasises the important need to develop more flexible pathways that allow progression as well as cross-over between the VET and the academic tracks. In view of these challenges, and in identifying strategies to achieve the Lisbon Goals, the Government of Malta has committed itself to specific policies that will target these issues. In the National Reform Programme, the Government of Malta reiterates its intention to continue to invest heavily in the education of its citizens. It binds itself to continue sustaining the pace of reform in order to increase the existing participation rates in further and higher education in an inclusive manner and in line with the nation's development needs. In the NRP, the Government of Malta commits itself to:

- Implement inclusive education and training policies aimed at adult learners and at reducing the number of early school leavers;
- Ensure that education and training pathways are attractive, accessible and flexible to provide maximum possible potential development of Maltese citizens;
- Respond to new occupational needs, key competences and future skills requirements.

It is thus necessary to offer an education system that provides quality training but is also **accessible to as many learners as possible**. The NRP thus lists among its priorities the importance to ensure that formal, informal and non-formal qualifications and skills are certified as part of the initiatives to promote lifelong learning. Among the measures to be taken, in response to the policy – *to ensure that education and training pathways are attractive, accessible and flexible to provide maximum possible fulfilment of the potential of every person throughout their working lives* -

³⁹ Ministry of Competitiveness and Communications, National Reform Programme: Malta's strategy for growth and jobs, October 2005

⁴⁰ This statement includes also youths in the age bracket 16-18 years

⁴¹ Office of the Prime Minister, For a Better Quality of Life: Pre-budget document 2006, July 2006

⁴² *ibid.* p.38

⁴³ *ibid.* p.66

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.67

there are included measures:

- M04.4 Intensify guidance services in order to enable the establishment of a comprehensive career pathway;
- M04.5 Ensure that formal, informal and non-formal qualifications and skills are certified.⁴⁵

Government's commitment to improving the provision of education is again emphasised in the 2006 pre-budget document⁴⁶. Among the strategic measures listed, one finds the commitment to extending the possibility of certification to meet today's aspirations, market trends and societal growth. There is listed that MATSEC will aim to offer certification in certain vocational areas. One also finds reference to further support for education and training pathways which are to become more attractive and flexible. Government is also committed to invest heavily in the expansion and quality of public further and higher education services. It recognises the need for more accountability within further and higher education and the importance of having institution and programme evaluation and accreditation against local recognised standards.

The development of a National Qualifications Framework is thus in response to both national and international challenges. The Lisbon targets and the work at European level in the development of a European Qualifications Framework coupled with the Government's commitment to keep its competitive edge through its highly skilled workforce, call for the need to develop a structure which allows the recognition and comparability of qualifications issued locally. Furthermore, it is in the interest of Malta's economy to have its own qualifications and qualifications framework.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Competitiveness and Communications, National Reform Programme: Malta's strategy for growth and jobs, October 2005, p.27

⁴⁶ Office of the Prime Minister, Securing Our Future: Pre-budget document 2007, August 2006

4.0 The Proposed Strategic Principles

The first step towards the setting up of a National Qualifications Framework was the publication of Legal Notice 347/2005. LN347 came into force on the 1st of October 2006. This legal notice deleted Legal Notice 215 of 2000 on the Malta Professional and Vocational Qualifications Regulations and provided the legal framework for setting up the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC). It describes how the MQC should be set up as well as lists the responsibilities and role that it needs to take up. The overall objective of the Council is stated to be that of steering the development of the National Qualifications Framework and to oversee the training and certification leading to qualifications within the Framework and which are not already provided for at compulsory education institutions or degree awarding bodies. The law indicates that in classifying qualifications and national standards of knowledge, skills, competences and attitudes, the Council is to be guided by eight levels of qualifications and competences describing the levels of qualifications and competences needed to access further study and training and to perform work at a specific level. These 8 levels are given in the table overleaf and provide guidance to the level of work as well as qualifications on which the National Qualifications Framework is to be based. The National Qualifications Framework is thus a tool for translating these eight levels to guide local qualifications and job levels, as well as comparing qualifications to those listed in the European Qualifications Framework.

The developments within MQC and the NQF consultation process (which started in November 2006) brought about possible changes to the 2005 Legal Notice. Although LN 347 remains a constant reference point to MQC, the level descriptors of Levels 2 and 3 (in particular) need to be revised in order to reflect the spirit of the proposed national qualifications framework. The NQF places the end of compulsory education at either Level 1 or 2 or 3. Each level is described in terms of the individual qualifications acquired at each of the levels as detailed in the annotations (cfr. pg.42) of the proposed NQF. Level 4 denotes the end of Upper Secondary Education. Such developments, in a relatively short period of time, are indicative of a constructive dialogue among key players in Malta's educational policies.

It is therefore important for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to have specific features and characteristics in order to ensure trust and recognition. The National Qualifications Framework thus needs to:

- **Be easily readable:** a National Qualifications Framework needs to be simple in structure allowing easy readability and application of its levels to a wide range of qualifications;
- **Have general application:** The NQF needs to be general enough in nature to allow its application to the various existent sectoral qualifications which can easily be aligned to it;
- **Be transparent:** The process by which the specific qualifications are attached to the different levels needs to be transparent and available enabling all stakeholders to follow and understand how it works;
- **Allow flexibility:** The NQF needs to offer flexible pathways allowing learners to move from one sector to another while progressing from one level to another, thus promoting lifelong learning;
- **Enable self-certification:** The Framework enables service providers and learners to estimate where their qualifications will/should fit into the National Qualifications Framework subject to confirmation/auditing and Quality Assurance by MQC, thereby obtaining accreditation and recognition;
- **Ensure quality assurance:** The NQF will require that qualifications issued in Malta adhere to specific standards of quality assurance, thus ensuring that education and training provision is of the desired quality;
- **Provide recognition of qualifications:** The NQF is the tool for the comparison (i) in Malta and (ii) within Europe of local qualifications with each other within the European Qualifications Framework. It thus provides the mechanism for the recognition of local qualifications across Europe;

- **Promote mobility:** The NQF, in regulating qualifications provided in Malta and in aligning each qualification to a particular level, will enable the recognition of qualifications across Europe, making it easier for the recognition of workers' skills and promoting mobility across Europe;
- **Provide the framework for the recognition of informal and non-formal education:** The NQF will provide the structure and framework through which one can obtain recognition for learning which takes place at work and in other situations outside formal institutions and to be able to utilise such recognition to progress within the framework as part of the lifelong learning process;
- **Allow the development of tools for the recognition of prior learning (RPL):** The NQF should allow the recognition of prior learning in order to enable individuals to place themselves on a level within the NQF and to allow them to proceed to higher levels during their working life;
- **Enhance lifelong learning:** The NQF is the tool through which individuals can identify their level of learning as well as be able to progress from one level to another, be it through formal, informal and non-formal education.

The National Qualifications Framework will help bring about a number of changes and improvements in the present provision of education and training in Malta.

It will help **promote greater parity of esteem between the vocational and the academic strands of education.** This can be achieved as a result of the transformation and modernisation of vocational education provision in Malta in aligning its courses with the qualifications framework and in ensuring that qualifications are industry-driven and quality assured through established national quality assurance mechanisms.

As a result of these changes and from an economic perspective, the result of these changes will serve to help with the process of raising the skills profile of Malta's workforce. The NQF will thus be the tool to allow citizens to progress with their studies, with the country benefiting from an improved knowledge-based economy and society.

Table 3: Description of levels in Legal Notice 347/2005*

Level	Qualification and Competence Description
8	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to have access to employment in specialized fields and career progression for those involved in jobs requiring research skills, scholarly work and leadership. Level 8 qualifications are associated with the third cycle of qualifications in higher education.
7	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to gain access to employment and to career progression within the specialist field. Level 7 qualifications are associated with the second cycle of qualifications in higher education.
6	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to gain access to professional employment opportunities and are often career entry qualifications for professional and managerial work. Level 6 qualifications are associated with the first cycle of qualifications in higher education and provide access to further learning opportunities in higher education.
5	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to gain access to higher education programmes at Level 6, to employment in highly skilled work or to career progression through improved recognition of work capabilities. Qualifications at Level 5 typically follow completion of a post secondary learning programme, such as apprenticeship together with post programme experience in a related field. High grade technicians and managers achieve these qualifications that often bridge secondary with tertiary education and training. Higher education qualifications at this level are associated with the 'short-cycle' [within the first cycle] of qualifications in the framework developed under the Bologna Process.
4	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to obtain routes to further learning and to employment in skilled work that can be performed independently and entails supervisory and coordination duties. This level of qualification also supports further specialized training for those seeking job enhancement. Level 4 achievements typically reflect completion of upper secondary education and some formal learning in post compulsory education, or in adult education including labour market training.
3	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to gain access to semi-skilled employment, further training and higher education. Level 3 achievements reflect formal learning in part of upper secondary or adult education in schools, colleges, training centres or learning in workplaces. It also reflects non-formal learning through work and basic training in an occupational field. This level can be a key stage in a lifelong education pathway.
2	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to enter into qualification based training programmes and to gain access to unskilled employment that may include a further element of training. This level can also be the entry point to a lifelong learning pathway. Learning at this level is formally acquired during compulsory education and can include an induction to work. The achievement of qualifications at this level may be regarded as the end of compulsory education.
1	The holder of a qualification at this level will be able to further learning opportunities and to gain access to unskilled employment that may include a further element of training. This level is often the entry point to a lifelong pathway for people with no qualifications. Learning is normally developed during compulsory education and contributes to general education but is also achieved through adult learning programmes and through non-formal and informal learning opportunities.

*** Level descriptors in LN 347 will have to be fine tuned to reflect the proposed NQF. Such an evolution indicates a dynamic process that aims to achieve a harmonised framework and system of qualifications across all levels of education and training.**

4.1 The Proposed National Qualifications Framework

The proposed framework at European level aims at identifying and defining key competences⁴⁷. Key competences are defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context and which every individual needs for personal fulfilment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment⁴⁸.

Table 4: Definitions of key knowledge, skills and competences

Term	Definition
Knowledge	'Knowledge' is the outcome of the collection and assimilation of information through learning. In the EQF, knowledge is described as theoretical and/or factual.
Skills	'Skills' are 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).
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.

These key competences, essential for lifelong learning, must be an integral part of the NQF. Eight key competences have been identified. Each one is defined as a combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes, these being:

- **Communication in the mother tongue:** The ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written format, and to interact linguistically in an appropriate and creative way in the full range of societal and cultural contexts – education and training, work, home and leisure;
- **Communication in foreign languages:** This is similar to that for the mother tongue and refers to the understanding, expression and interpretation of thoughts, feelings and opinions in both oral and written form. It also calls for skills such as mediation and intercultural understanding;
- **Mathematical competence and basic competences in science and technology:** Mathematical competence refers to the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations and includes a mastery of numeracy, as well as a willingness to use mathematical modes of thought and presentation. Scientific competence refers to the ability to use the body of knowledge and methodology employed to explain the natural world in order to identify and question and draw evidence-based conclusions. Competence in technology involves the application of that knowledge and methodology in response to perceived human needs or wants;
- **Digital competence:** The confident and critical use of Information Society Technology for work, leisure and communication;
- **Learning to learn:** The ability for individuals to organise their own learning through being aware of their own learning processes or needs. It means gaining, processing and assimilating new knowledge and skills as well as seeking and making use of guidance;

⁴⁷ Commission Staff Working Document "Towards a European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning, SEC (2005) 957, p.29

⁴⁸ *ibid*

- **Social and civic competences:** All forms of behaviour that equip individuals to participate in an effective and constructive way in social and working life, and particularly in increasingly diverse societies to resolve conflict where necessary. It is based on knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and a commitment to active and democratic participation;
- **Sense of initiative and entrepreneurship:** The ability to turn ideas into actions. It involves creativity, innovation and risk taking as well as planning and management of projects in order to achieve objectives. It is a foundation needed for establishing social and commercial activities;
- **Cultural awareness and expression:** The appreciation of the importance of the creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions in a range of media, including music, arts, literature, and the visual arts.

All these competences are considered equally important because they are all essential for achieving a knowledge-based society. There is an amount of overlap between the various competences as more than one is often used concurrently in facing the challenges of everyday life at home, during leisure and at the workplace. It is important for each of these key competences to be incorporated in the different levels of the National Qualifications Framework. This will ensure a skilled and competent workforce as well as active citizens in Malta.

The National Qualifications Framework that is being proposed is given in the three figures that follow (Figures 6-8). The Framework takes the existing qualifications currently being issued by local education and training institutions and superposes them on the eight different levels. One can also note the introduction of new levels and consequently new nomenclatures leading to new types of qualifications.

The NQF can be expressed in three different dimensions:

- according to the EXIT point, that is which level one achieves in completing studies (figure 6);
- across the educational SECTOR, giving the levels that are offered by the school, vocational and tertiary education tracks; and
- by OCCUPATION, where jobs are generally aligned to the qualification level of the individual.

The NQF is being presented in these different ways in order to highlight how qualifications can be related to and compared with the different educational tracks as well as applied to the labour market. It facilitates the comparison of levels achieved between the vocational and tertiary sectors. It also helps to peg the different job levels to the qualifications held.

Figure 8: The Proposed National Qualifications Framework* by Exit Point Qualification

8	DOCTORAL DEGREE		8
7	MASTER'S DEGREE POST-GRADUATE DIPLOMA POST-GRADUATE CERTIFICATE		7
6	BACHELOR'S DEGREE		6
5	UNDERGRADUATE DIPLOMA UNDERGRADUATE CERTIFICATE	VET HIGHER DIPLOMA	5
4	MATRICULATION LEVEL ADVANCED LEVEL INTERMEDIATE LEVEL	VET DIPLOMA	4(e)
3	GENERAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE LEVEL 3 SEC Grade 1-5	VET LEVEL 3	3(d)
2	GENERAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE LEVEL 2 SEC Grade 6-7	VET LEVEL 2	2(c)
1	GENERAL EDUCATION CERTIFICATE LEVEL 1 School Leaving Certificate	VET LEVEL 1	1(a/b)

Annotations: *The NQF is designed in such a way as to be able to include diverse forms of qualifications not as yet covered by this Framework. (a) The MQC recommends that a Full VET level 1 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as a Full School Leaving Certificate. (b) Attainment of the Basic Employment Passport together with either the Adult Skills Certificate or the MQC 8 Key Competences at Level 1 are also considered as a full VET Level 1 qualification. (c) The MQC recommends that a Full VET Level 2 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 4 General Education Level 2 subjects. (d) The MQC recommends that a Full VET Level 3 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 6 General Education Level 3 subjects. (e) The Malta Qualifications Council recommends that a Full VET Diploma should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 3 Advanced Level Subjects.

Table 5: Descriptions of Qualification Levels

Level	Qualification	Details
8	Doctorate	<p>Purpose: For employment in specialized fields and career progression for those involved in jobs requiring research skills, scholarly work and leadership</p> <p>Context: Academic usually research based but can also have taught components</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Can carry out research professionally, conduct scholarly work, provide leadership</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: Accredited Higher Education Institutions/National Quality Assurance Agencies</p> <p>Pathway to the level: Level 7 / Masters' Degree or Equivalent</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: Higher Education Institutions</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate by University</p>
7	Masters	<p>Purpose: For employment and career progression within the specialist field</p> <p>Context: Academic or professional, mainly taught, often also including dissertation</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Become specialised within a field of research, can take responsibility and lead in a particular area of specialisation</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: Accredited Higher Education Institutions/National Quality Assurance Agencies</p> <p>Pathway to the level: Level 6, Bachelors (Hons) degree or Equivalent</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: Higher Education Institutions</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate of Degree, Record of Achievement of individual grades</p>
6	Bachelors	<p>Purpose: Will be able to gain access to professional employment opportunities and are often career entry qualifications for professional and managerial work.</p> <p>Context: Higher Education Institutions, Vocational Institutions, mainly taught but can also include work components</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: A person has basic foundations to carry out practices within a profession, can demonstrate independence of work and carry responsibilities</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: Accredited Academic and Vocational Higher Education Institutions</p> <p>Pathway to the level: Level 5, Matriculation Certificate & special course requirements, specified VET Higher Diplomas or Maturity Clause</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: Higher Education Institutions</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate of Degree, Diploma Supplement, VET Record of Achievement</p>

5	<p>VET Higher Diploma</p> <p>Undergraduate Diploma Undergraduate Certificate</p>	<p>Purpose: For employment in highly skilled work or to career progression through improved recognition of work capabilities</p> <p>Context: Mainly taught courses by higher or vocational institutions with a part of work experience in training provided (mainly in vocational)</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Be able to carry out highly technical work requiring specific skills to be able to carry out complex administrative tasks;</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: Accredited Higher Education and Vocational and Training Institutions</p> <p>Pathway to the level: Level 4, Matriculation Certificate or VET Diploma or Maturity Clause</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: Higher & Vocational Institutions, Accrediting Bodies or Accredited Private Training Institutions</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Final Certificate and transcript of grades; Certificate Supplement; VET Record of Achievement; EUROPASS</p>
4	<p>VET Diploma</p> <p>Matriculation Level Advanced Level Intermediate Level</p>	<p>Purpose: For employment in skilled work that can be performed independently and entails supervisory and coordination duties</p> <p>Context: Mainly taught with working periods for vocational training</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Be able to carry out skilled work independently and carry out administrative tasks assigned</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: Accredited Higher Education [MATSEC] and Vocational and Training Institutions</p> <p>Pathway to the level: Level 3, 6 SEC grades 1-5 or VET Level 3</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: MATSEC Unit, Vocational Institutions, International Recognized Accrediting Bodies</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate showing level of achievement; Certificate Supplement; VET Record of Achievement; EUROPASS</p>
3	<p>VET Level 3</p> <p>GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 3 SEC Grade 1-5</p>	<p>Purpose: Be able to gain access to semi-skilled employment</p> <p>Context: Mainly taught with emphasis on key competences in vocational education, some sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge also included</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Basic level of key competences, some skills in a particular sector</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: MATSEC Unit, Vocational Institutions and International Accredited Bodies</p> <p>Pathway to the level: Compulsory Education, Vocational course leading to VET Level 2</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: MATSEC Unit, Vocational and Training Institutions, International Recognized Accrediting Bodies</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate showing level of achievement; VET Record of Achievement; EUROPASS; Certificate Supplement</p>

2	<p>VET Level 2</p> <p>GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 2 SEC Grade 6-7</p>	<p>Purpose: Be able to enter into qualification based training programmes and to gain access to lower level of skilled employment that may include a further element of training</p> <p>Context: Mainly taught with emphasis on key competences in vocational education, some sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge also included</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Aspects of key competences achieved; sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: MATSEC Unit, Vocational and Training Institutions, International Recognized Accrediting Bodies</p> <p>Pathway to the level: School Leaving Certificate , Vocational course leading to VET Level I</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: MATSEC Unit, Vocational and Training Institutions; International Accrediting Bodies</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate showing level of achievement; VET Record of Achievement; EUROPASS; Certificate Supplement</p>
1	<p>VET LEVEL I</p> <p>GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL I School Leaving Certificate</p>	<p>Purpose: To gain access to lower level of skilled employment at foundation skills levels that may include a further element of training. It is also the entry point for lifelong learning</p> <p>Context: Taught but can also be gained through work experiences</p> <p>Learning Outcomes: Start learning some elements of basic key competences</p> <p>Responsibility of assessment: MATSEC Unit, Vocational Institutions</p> <p>Pathway to the level: As the entry point anybody can have access to this level; no qualifications necessary</p> <p>Authority to issue qualification: MATSEC Unit, Vocational and Training Institutions</p> <p>Transcript of results achieved: Certificate showing level of achievement; VET Record of Achievement; EUROPASS; Certificate Supplement</p>

Any of the levels (and in particular at Levels 1 to 5) within the NQF should incorporate three dimensions:

- **key competences** (fully autonomous manifestation of skills) which refer to the key competences just described in the previous section;
- **sectoral skills** (practice) that include skills related to the specific vocational sector of the training provided; and
- **underpinning knowledge** (content) which includes that knowledge which is relevant to the discipline within which training is provided or within which experience has been gained.

Although all levels should include elements of these three aspects, there should be different weighting according to the level and the sector. The first three levels of the NQF (Levels 1-3) focus particularly on equipping citizens with these basic skills. Both within the vocational and general education track, these basic competences can be considered to have been achieved by level three. It is being proposed that the proportion dedicated to each of these aspects for each level and within the different education sectors to focus mainly on these competences within the lower levels, with sectoral and underpinning knowledge having greater space as one moves up from level to level. However, within each level, there must always be a learning component that targets the key competences.

4.2 The NQF by exit point of Qualification

The National Qualifications Framework proposed by MQC is based on the principle of valuing all learning whether formal, informal, non-formal and prior learning contexts as well as sectoral qualifications which will also be aligned to the NQF. It is also based on two overarching principles namely:

- parity of esteem and,
- progression.

As a matter of principle, MQC allocated the various levels of qualifications on the basis of the difficulty of the learning outcomes acquired by the learner at the exit point of each level of the NQF.

The General Education Level 1 qualification of the NQF is necessarily related to the end of compulsory education. The second and third Levels of General Education Level qualifications and the first Levels of VET qualifications are accessible to students at the end of compulsory education and to adult learners who wish to further their personal knowledge, skills and competences in the context of lifelong learning.

VET Levels 1, 2 and 3 can be attained through Full or Partial certification. A Full certification is one which covers all learning outcomes within a programme of studies. A Partial certification can be obtained by having accumulated a number of credits in one or more strands (underpinning knowledge, sectoral skills and key competences) within a programme of education and training from different training providers at different points in time.

At VET Level 1 there are two alternative routes in order to obtain a full VET Level 1 certification these being the Basic Employment Passport – BEP - (issued by the Employment and Training Corporation) together with the Adults Skills Certificate (issued by the Department of Further Studies and Adult Education of the Education Division) or the BEP together with the MQC 8 Key Competences at Level 1 (cfr. *Descriptors of Key Competences in the National Qualifications Framework* published by the Malta Qualifications Council, May 2007).

The School Leaving Certificate is a final certification of a student's performance attainment, behaviour and attendance either on completion of the five year course at secondary level or on reaching the compulsory School Leaving Age of sixteen. In particular, a School Leaving Certificate awarded on completion of the five year course at Secondary level, success being based on grades and assessments in the basic subjects and in the choice of subject/s according to the criteria established by the Education Division is denominated as a Full School Leaving Certificate.

The Malta Qualifications Council recommends that a Full VET Level 1 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as a Full School Leaving Certificate.

In the case of students who have left compulsory education with a School Leaving certificate which is not a Full School Leaving certificate, the opportunity is being made available through VET Level 1 so that they may obtain a certificate that enjoys the same parity of esteem as a Full School Leaving Certificate.

The Level of SEC qualifications refers to individual subjects in which, individuals can obtain grades 6 and 7 related to NQF Level 2 or grades 1 to 5 at NQF Level 3. In order to promote parity of esteem between the General Education qualifications and VET qualifications, MQC is recommending that a Full VET Level 2 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 4 General Education Level 2 subjects. Furthermore, MQC is also recommending that, a Full VET Level 3 qualification should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 6 General Education Level 3 subjects.

Level 4 of the NQF in the academic route is characterised by a hierarchy of qualifications within the context of the Matriculation Certificate course from a full Matriculation Certificate (Modeled on the International Baccalaureate) to Advanced and Intermediate Levels respectively. The MQC recommends that a Full VET Diploma should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 3 Advanced Level subjects.

In this dimension, the NQF is represented in terms of qualifications issued. It gives the level achieved on completing an education or training course, a work-based qualification or RPL assessment. **Entrance into a Level of qualification does not imply achievement of that level.** Only on the successful completion of the education and training programme is the level achieved. Level 6 for example indicates completion of a Bachelor's degree; Level 5 completion of either a VET Higher diploma or an undergraduate Certificate or Diploma; Level 4 the successful completion of a VET Diploma or a Matriculation Certificate. The successful completion of subjects at Advanced and Intermediate Levels also indicates a Level 4 qualification.

In terms of parity of esteem, the successful completion of compulsory education signified by a Full School Leaving Certificate is indicative of a Level 1 in the NQF. A VET Level 1 Certificate is also at Level 1 in the NQF. Level 2 is signalled by a VET Level 2 Certificate which MQC recommends that it should enjoy the same parity of esteem as four SEC subjects at grade 6 or 7. Similarly, Level 3 indicates the successful completion of a VET Level 3 Certificate which MQC recommends that it should enjoy the same parity of esteem as 6 SEC at grades 1 to 5.

In the case of the vocational education track, qualifications within the first three levels of qualifications move on from the VET Level 1 to VET Level 2 to VET Level 3. This Certificate will allow one to proceed to a VET Diploma at Level 4 and on the successful completion of studies at this level, to the VET Higher Diploma at Level 5.

It is important to point out, that the NQF does not allow only progression within a particular education context, but is also a tool which establishes comparability of levels between general and vocational qualifications. The implication of this is that institutions offering training courses at higher levels will be able to specify entry requirements both in terms of general and vocational education qualification. This still allows institutions to specify which qualifications (general and/or vocational) they set as entry requirements.

The last three levels of the NQF refer to the three cycles identified within the Bologna Process (Dublin descriptors). Level 6 is equivalent to the short cycle of undergraduate which leads on completion to a Bachelor's degree. Level 7 is the second cycle which refers to Master's level. The third and top cycle is the Doctorate level - Level 8.

The NQF thus specifies the qualification one attains at the end of a level. It does not control the amount of time spent on completing the studies. The Malta Qualifications Council, however, needs to ensure that training provided at the various levels keeps specific standards in order to ensure quality assurance. (cfr. volume 3 of this series of MQC Working Documents)

The NQF is also a neutral device and therefore certificates, diplomas and degrees are in no way attached to specific institutions. Accredited institutions can offer qualifications if specific criteria established by MQC (which will be published in the second policy document on a *VET System for Malta's NQF*) are adhered to in the process of awarding certificates, diplomas and degrees.

4.3 The NQF by Educational Sector

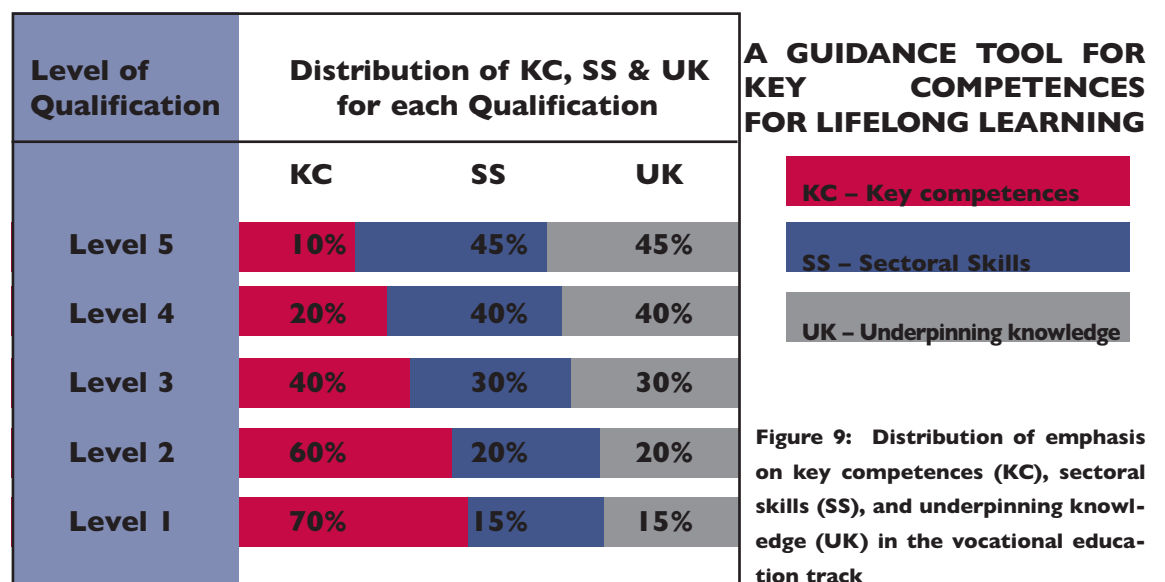
The National Qualifications Framework can also be expressed in terms of the institutions and the levels of qualifications that they offer. There are three main types of sectors:

- **the school sector:** The sector provides compulsory schooling, from the age of 5 to the age of 16.
- **the vocational sector:** This refers mainly to those training institutions that provide training of a vocational nature. These would include mainly MCAST as the main state provider, but also adult education and other private training providers such as ETC (Employment and Training Corporation), ITS (Institute of Tourism Studies), and the Institute of Conservation and Management of Cultural Heritage (ICMCH)
- **the higher education sector:** This refers to tertiary education, mainly that provided by the University of Malta, but also by other foreign Universities and possibly also by other private providers.

The school sector refers to compulsory education which, in Malta, starts at the age of five and finishes at the age of sixteen. In all, compulsory education covers eleven years of schooling or 99 months (based on a 9-month per year of school days). Learners follow a National Minimum Curriculum managed by the Education Division. On completion of compulsory education, examinations (SEC) are conducted by the University of Malta MATSEC Board. In principle the target is that learners should achieve a minimum of 6 SEC subjects with particular preference to subjects such as English and Maltese Language, Mathematics and Physics. The VET route accommodates all learners who completed compulsory education.

The vocational sector offers studies at Levels 1 to 5. There are no entry qualifications at level 1 of the NQF. It is essential that each of these levels provide a proportion of training in key competences, sectoral skills as well underpinning knowledge.

Figure 7 is **A GUIDANCE TOOL** to courses that normally would follow the weighting that is to be given to these three areas in each of the levels 1-5. The main emphasis of education offered at Level 1, that is in the VET Level 1, is mainly dedicated to the key competences with only 15% left to each of the sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge. As one progresses from Level 1 to Level 2 and more, the degree of time dedicated to the key competences decreases, becoming only around 10% when one progresses to VET Level 5. This has great implications to curriculum developers within the vocational sector who are bound to fulfil these requirements and to ensure that their courses follow these weightings and that graduates develop the basic key competences as they progress in their lifelong learning process. Existing curricula also need to be reviewed so that they can be adjusted to this proposed guidance tool.



School Sector	Vocational Education and training Sector	Higher Education Sector
		Doctoral Degree
		Master's Degree Post-graduate Degree Post-graduate Certificate
		Bachelor's Degree
	VET Higher Diploma	Undergraduate Diploma/Certificate
Matriculation Level Advanced Level Intermediate Level	VET Diploma	
Secondary Education Certificate	VET Level 3 VET Level 2	
School Leaving Certificate	VET Levels 1	

Figure 10: The Proposed Qualifications Framework across the Educational Sectors

Levels 6-8 fall within higher education and these are usually offered by Universities or Higher Education Institutions. This does not mean that vocational institutions will not be able to offer degrees. This is the point where the Bologna and the Copenhagen Processes converge. There can be two types of degrees offered which may have either an academic or professional orientation. These two types of degree can be offered by any type of institution (both vocational institutions and universities), although there is a tendency for vocational institutions to offer professional degrees. The common link is that any qualification at Level 6 would lead to a bachelor's degree and follows the quality assurance standards set by the MQC or any other relevant body regulating higher education.

Qualifications at Levels 6-8 also need to continue to build on elements of the identified key competences. Curriculum developers at these levels cannot disregard the key competences but must try to implement aspects of them in their courses in order to enable individuals to develop further.

4.4 The National Qualifications Framework by Profession

The Qualifications Framework can also be expressed in terms of labour market positions. In this dimension, the NQF specifies the level an individual needs to have in order to be able to do certain jobs. The eight strands are adjusted to fit into three main job levels, involving the:

- **Senior Operative and Operative:** This strand includes jobs from basic up to semi-skilled jobs. Elementary jobs include examples such as driver, watchman, handyman, waitress, and other basic-skilled jobs. The senior operatives relate to the semi-skilled jobs such as machine operators, salespersons, farmers, etc. A VET Level 3 certification is often regarded as fulfilling the traditional craftsmanship skills and competences.
- **Technical and Administrative:** This section includes most of the administrative levels from secretary to higher levels of administrative workers. It also includes skilled workers such as mechanics, technicians, machine operators, etc.
- **Professional and Managerial:** This strand includes those jobs which are considered professions such as doctors, nurses, teachers, lawyers, engineers, etc. It also includes those personnel who are in top managerial positions and consequently involving substantial responsibilities at work and knowledge, skills and competences at the forefront of a particular sector.

The use of the National Qualifications Framework acts as a guide for both employers and workers. It is intended to facilitate employers' process of identifying the educational level of required personnel when issuing calls for jobs. It also serves as guidance to individuals to identify what type of jobs they are eligible for and what qualifications they need in order to apply for certain positions. It serves as guidance to learners within the lifelong learning path such that they can identify what studies they need to follow in aiming to achieve their targets in their educational progression as well as within their working life.

According to the NQF, the first three levels, which have already been closely linked to the basic key competences, enable a person to look for elementary and entry level jobs in the labour market or basic jobs. In fact, Level 3 is equivalent to the successful completion of compulsory education **using the criteria established by the MATSEC Board**. If one is aspiring to higher levels, and consequently better paying jobs, then it is essential to proceed with one's studies at post-compulsory level of education. Levels 4 and 5 lead one to technical and administrative work. These require an individual to possess certain basic academic competences or technical training in order to perform these jobs. If one, however, wants to proceed to managerial and professional roles, then it is essential to continue with studies further up the NQF with the minimum being that of a bachelor's degree and a doctorate at maximum level.

The recognition of informal and non-formal education levels as well as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) will also be possible when MQC sets up the policies, criteria and infrastructure to evaluate such learning.

8	DOCTORAL DEGREE	PROFESSIONAL AND MANAGERIAL
7	MASTER'S DEGREE POST-GRADUATE DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE	
6	BACHELOR'S DEGREE	
5	UNDERGRADUATE DIPLOMA/CERTIFICATE VET HIGHER DIPLOMA	TECHNICAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE
4	MATRICULATION, ADV & INT LEVEL VET DIPLOMA	
3	VET LEVEL 3 GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 3	(Craftsmanship Level) SENIOR OPERATIVE AND OPERATIVE
2	VET LEVEL 2 GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 2	
1	VET LEVEL 1 GENERAL EDUCATION LEVEL 1 SCHOOL LEAVING CERTIFICATE	

Figure 11: The National Qualifications Framework in terms of general occupational level

5.0 Practical Guidelines for Key Stakeholders

The National Qualifications Framework has different implications to the different key stakeholders, being training providers, student bodies, unions, recognition bodies, professional bodies and employers. Most of all it has great significance to the individual learner willing to continue with his/her studies beyond the basic school years.

5.1 Implications to education and training providers

The NQF has many implications to education and training providers. The outcomes of all training is to be of value to the learner in his/her lifelong education progression. This needs to be aligned to the NQF. This means that all training providers, including state institutions as well as private providers, need to:

- Be recognised by the Malta Qualifications Council as service providers. The outcome of this implies that every institution in Malta providing training courses needs to follow standards of quality assurance set by the MQC in order to be recognised as an accredited institution. It is the intention of the MQC to build up a register of accredited institutions which is public and which learners can consult before applying to follow any course;
- Training providers would also need to apply to the MQC to have their courses accredited and aligned to a level within the qualifications framework. In order to do this, it is necessary for courses to follow guidelines set by the MQC – mainly that of defining the course in terms of learner outcomes such that they can be compared to the eight levels of the Framework;
- Training providers need to develop quality assurance measures as set out by the MQC in order to ensure that the courses they provide reach the standards set by the MQC and which entitles them to remain in the register which would be continuously revised and updated.

The NQF will also pose new challenges to higher education institutions. Since the NQF makes the comparability of levels between the vocational and academic track easy and simple to translate, higher education institutions can now consider opening up their entry requirements to courses at Level 6 to graduates from the vocational sector at Level 5. Obviously this does not imply that anybody with a Level 5 qualification is entitled to any course offered at Level 6. One still has to keep in mind that the preceding qualification needs to be in the same or related to the studies to be followed. It is thus possible for the University of Malta to look into the option of opening up its entry requirements, mainly those of Matriculation Certificate, and to look at which MCAST courses at Level 4 provide the necessary background for further studies at tertiary level.

This is not completely new to the University of Malta, but the comparability of levels introduced by the NQF will help to remove many of the obstacles that many individuals face on completion of studies at MCAST and provide an alternative and **more cost-effective route to higher education** than that offered by overseas higher education institutions.

On the other hand, vocational institutions can claim **parity of esteem** as there now will be official comparability with qualifications within the academic track. Due to the professional nature of the courses offered within the vocational track, the NQF offers challenges, these requiring that:

- Vocational courses leading to particular employment would be related to the right level of qualification. This means that it has to be ensured that courses of a technical dimension need to be at Levels 4 and 5, and so on for all the professional courses offered;
- Vocational institutions offering the first three levels of certificate need to ensure that they provide the proportion of training in key competences, sectoral skills and underpinning knowledge as specified in the NQF, thus ensuring the accreditation of their course;
- Vocational institutions also need to work closely with higher education institutions to ensure that the qualifications they are issuing have the necessary components which would provide vocational graduates access to further studies at higher levels within Universities.

There are also challenges within the schooling sector, where the NQF provides the possibility for compulsory education to provide a degree of vocational training, thus preparing students through the vocational route rather than that of SEC qualifications.

5.2 Implications to Student Bodies

Student bodies have an important role to play in the whole process. It is their responsibility to try and inform students about the National Qualifications Framework and the importance for any learner wishing to follow a course of studies to check the quality and level of what is being offered. This will be possible through MQC's dissemination material, mainly through the website but also through other channels. Informed learners will lead to better informed training decisions and better progression within the Framework. Student bodies thus need to:

- Make students aware of the National Qualifications Framework, its use and its importance in lifelong learning;
- Explain to students the importance of checking the accreditation of institutions as well as the levels of courses offered before deciding to follow any courses;
- Explain to students how the NQF provides a framework for the comparability of qualifications across Europe since the NQF is related to the levels of the EQF. The NQF will thus facilitate the mobility of students for further studies across Europe. It will also facilitate the comparability of qualifications also for employment purposes in mobility across Europe;
- They can also act as participants in the process by building a structured dialogue with the Malta Qualifications Council.

5.3 Implications to Employers

The National Qualifications Framework can be a very useful tool to employers in various ways. It will help employers when employing personnel as it will give an indication of the general skills level of potential recruits as well as in promoting continuous professional development among their employees. Employers will thus be able to use the NQF by:

- using the first basic three levels to obtain an indication of the level of education and basic key competences of the applicants for jobs. This will reduce the great number of youths who look for work with no basic qualifications, leaving employers without any guidance about their level of education;
- learning to specify the qualifications level needed for every call for application for posts, whatever the level. This will avoid people with inadequate qualifications to apply for posts for which they are not eligible and help to make the selection process more transparent. This may also have implications for the civil service where all civil service posts will have to specify the level of the qualification required;
- relating qualifications to general conditions of recruitment including relevant experience;
- refer to the NQF when investing in the professional development of their workers. Any investment in their personnel's further training should lead to progression on the NQF. There will be quality assured training provision which will help employees move up the framework and consequently provide better human capital to their employers.

5.4 Implications to Unions

Unions have various roles with respect to the NQF. They can use the NQF to define job descriptions to the different jobs. Unions also have an educational role and should provide career guidance to workers, encouraging them to become lifelong learners, but also providing guidance about how one can progress from one level of the NQF to the next. Unions thus need to:

- use the NQF to regulate the qualification level required for the range of jobs available in the labour market;

- take the NQF as a reference point to professional development and on-the-job training;
- disseminate the meaning of the NQF and its utility to the individual as part of his/her life-long learning progression during his/her working life;
- provide career guidance to workers, explaining the function and use of the NQF for life-long learning as well as in the case of worker mobility across Europe.

Unions can also apply to become accredited training bodies to provide accreditation and be able to give certification to those workers who often opt to follow training courses offered by the trade unions themselves. Trade unions will therefore be able to promote the development of key competences of their worker members.

5.5 Implications to Professional Bodies

Professional bodies are usually the bodies responsible for regulating their profession. They are responsible for providing members of their profession with a warrant to practise the profession. The NQF will facilitate the process of identifying the level of the qualification needed in order to form part of the profession. It is also common for these bodies to receive requests, either by foreign nationals wanting to work in Malta or Maltese nationals who have obtained qualifications abroad, to apply for a warrant. The NQF will help simplify the exercise of comparability of foreign qualifications, particularly those obtained within Member States of the European Union as it is the tool for comparability with the EQF.

Professional bodies thus need to:

- Use the levels on the NQF to identify the level of qualification necessary in order to apply to become a member of the profession;
- Use the NQF to compare European qualifications with national ones for issuing warrants;
- Promote the professional development of its members by disseminating information about the NQF and how one can progress from one level to the next.
- Encourage the setting up of Sector Skills Units to create qualifications tailor-made to Malta's economic needs.

5.6 Implications to Recognition and Qualifications Information Bodies

Recognition and qualifications information centres provide information about the different qualifications and evaluate diplomas and certificates for the purpose of academic, vocational and occupational mobility. Recognition and qualifications information centres are normally part of networks involved in information management of qualifications.

The publication of a National Qualifications Framework has a direct impact on the activities of such bodies.

Such bodies will have the responsibility to:

- Familiarize themselves with the new NQF being proposed;
- Disseminate information to all stakeholders including and especially the international networks associated ENIC/NARIC on the new NQF;
- Recognize qualifications as indicated in the NQF and use the NQF nomenclature in disseminating information about the Maltese qualifications system;
- Deal with the comparability of academic and vocational qualifications in line with the proposed NQF;
- Promote the NQF model of Malta to support the application of the EQF at national level.

6.0 Action Plan for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework

It is not enough to identify the different levels of qualifications in eight levels. It is but the first step in ensuring a regulatory role for qualifications issued in Malta. The previous section has highlighted the implications of the NQF to the different stakeholders. Guidelines have also been provided to the next actions that each and every one of the key stakeholders needs to take in order to have (through MQC,) all qualifications in line with the NQF. The successful implementation of the NQF will ensure that qualifications issued in Malta carry currency across Europe, raising the value of our workers and opening up greater opportunities locally and within the European region. It also helps local education institutions to be able to attract more foreign fee-paying students, giving the educational sector higher status internationally while also bringing in financial support for further training offered to local students.

The main action plan being proposed aims to have a major component of the National Qualifications Framework in place by the beginning of the next academic year – that is by October 2006. This requires the Malta Qualifications Council to set the standards for quality assurance for education and training institutions, with greater emphasis on vocational education. It also needs to develop the procedure to be followed and the tools whereby education and training providers can align their current courses to the National Qualifications Standards. It may also be the case that training providers may need to revise, adjust, fine tune and improve existing training courses to be eligible for alignment.

The action plan thus involves the following stages which need to be taken by the various key stakeholders within the time frames set.

In order to have the NQF fully implanted, it is necessary for the MQC to provide guidance and tools for use by training providers in order to complete the transition to the new regulatory role in the smoothest way possible. As can be identified in the action plan, the MQC has taken on this responsibility and will publish an additional two documents which would provide guidance, in one aspect to the vocational sector which will have to start working within this new framework and the new levels. It will also provide guidance on the quality assurance standards that it will be expecting from training institutions that want to be included in the official MQC register and thus gain recognition for the courses that they offer.

Target Date	Action	Key stakeholders involved
Q1 2007	Preparation of working documents on the NQF and the provision of vocational education in Malta	MQC, vocational sector, higher education, compulsory education providers, private training institutions, employers' bodies, professional bodies, student bodies, trade unions, ETC, etc.
Q2 2007	Publication and consultation of working documents	MQC, vocational sector, higher education, compulsory education providers, private training institutions, employers' bodies, professional bodies, student bodies, trade unions, ETC, etc.
Q2 2007	Finalisation of the working documents on the NQF, on VET in Malta's NQF and on Quality Assurance in VET	MQC
END OF CONSULTATION PROCESS ON NQF		
Q2/3 2007	Consultation on working documents	MQC
Q2/3 2007	Alignment exercise by public institutions where qualifications are linked to the NQF	Vocational sector, higher education, compulsory education providers, private training institutions
Q4 2007	Application by institutions for accreditation	Vocational sector, private training institutions
Q4 2007	Publication of courses with NQF levels indicated	MQC, vocational sector, higher education, compulsory education providers, private training institutions
Q4 2007	Publication of courses with NQF level indicated on MQC website	MQC
Q1 2008	ETC and other public entities to start indicating qualifications level on job availability	MQC, ETC
Q2 2008	Publication of register of accredited training institutions on MQC website	MQC
START OF ACCREDITATION PROCESS		

Table 6: Action plan for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework Q1, 2007 to Q2, 2008

The NQF cannot be successfully implemented without the active participation of the key stakeholders in the whole implementation process. It is important for all key players to provide constructive feedback and practical suggestions during the consultation process such that these can be included in the final document. It is also the duty of all types of education and training providers to take the necessary actions to follow the guidelines set by the MQC in order to ensure that our learners will be provided with quality standard qualifications that have currency across all Europe and are cost-effective.

7.0 Conclusion

This working document, the first in a series of three other documents, aims at introducing the main concepts linked with the setting up of a National Qualifications Framework for Malta and which have been discussed during the various sessions of the Malta Qualifications Council.

The main message is that qualifications should reflect a value for all learning. Irrespective of the context and the ability of the individual, Malta's NQF accredits learning outcomes at the end of each cycle of learning.

At an institutional level the NQF is the tool through which the government is working towards achieving a knowledge-based society as is identified in the Lisbon target. It offers Maltese citizens the tool for flexible education pathways. It provides comparability of qualifications through a system which is transparent and based on quality assurance standards. These have already all been listed as government's actions in the National Reform Programme. The NQF thus provides the impetus needed to improve our workforce such that Malta can remain and increase its competitiveness and be able to face up to the new challenges that a global economy brings with it.

Furthermore, this working document aims at making qualifications an achievable objective for as many learners as possible and at valuing all learning experiences. Although the objective of this document is to provoke change and innovation, its ultimate goal is to create a culture of achievement for all. Qualifications are tools for employment. A qualifications framework provides a map which will guide learners and training providers to achieve success in their endeavours.

It is expected that this working document will be the first edition in a series of other working documents updating Malta's National Qualifications Framework.

This draft working document is followed by a document providing guidelines on a vocational education and training system aligned to the proposed NQF (Vol. 2) and guidelines for quality assurance in a VET system (Vol. 3).

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Annex II:

Glossary of Select Terminology Associated with Qualifications Frameworks

Accumulation and transfer of qualifications

Accumulation and transfer of qualifications means that training programmes or parts [units] of programmes are interchangeable or can replace each other and that validated learning outcomes can exempt a person of whole or 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.

Accreditation (of programmes, 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 by having met predetermined standards.

Assessment

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

Awarding body

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

Basic skills (key competences)

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

Bologna process

The Bologna process initiated by the Bologna Declaration of European Ministers of Education on 19th June 1999 is a commitment by all EU Member States 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)

The process of formally validating knowledge, know-how and/or skills and competences acquired by an individual, following a standard assessment procedure. 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.

Comparability of qualifications

The extent to which it is possible to establish equivalence between the level and content of formal qualifications (certificates or diplomas) at sectoral, regional, national or international levels.

Continuing education and training

Education or training after initial education or entry into working life, aimed at helping individuals to: *improve or update their knowledge and/or skills; acquire new skills for a career move or retraining; continue their personal or professional development.*

Copenhagen Declaration

The Copenhagen Declaration of the European Ministers of Vocational Education and Training and the European Commission convened in Copenhagen on the 29th and 30th of June 2002 is a declaration on enhanced European cooperation in vocational education and training.

Credits

Credits are awarding tools [such as A, B or C etc...] for the successful completion of a task. 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, vocational and training providers, competent bodies and learners to support arrangements for accumulation and recognition for learning outcomes towards a qualification and for transnational mobility. Credits [credit points] are allocated to the qualifications and to the units of which a qualification is made up.

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.

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.

Knowledge

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

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 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 achievement by the individual.

Lifelong learning

All learning activity undertaken throughout life, with the aim of improving knowledge, skills and competences within a personal, civic, social and/or employment-related perspective.

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

Qualifications systems include all aspects of a country's activity that result in the recognition of learning. These systems include the means of developing and operationalizing 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

A transparent and clearly defined process to assure that quality education and training and quality deliverables will be built in institutions, training programmes and programmes of studies before the work is done.

Qualification

A 'qualification' is achieved when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards. A qualification is a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process.

Qualifications Framework

A qualifications framework provides a system of coordination and for comparing qualifications by relating qualifications to each other, for promoting the quality of education and training provision, 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 framework may be comprehensive of all learning achievement and pathways in a country or may be confined to a particular sector.

Recognition

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. Social recognition is the acknowledgement of the value of skills and/or competences by economic and social stakeholders such as employers or national or international institutions.

Regulated profession

Professional activity or group of professional activities access to which, and the practice of which (or to one of its forms), is directly or indirectly subject to legislative, regulatory or administrative provisions concerning the possession of specific professional qualifications.

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.

Skills

'Skills' are 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).

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

The degree to which the value of qualifications can be identified and compared on the (sectoral, regional, national or international) labour and training markets.

Validation (of non-formal and informal 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

The process of recognizing participation in and outcomes of (formal or non-formal) learning, in order to raise awareness of its intrinsic worth and to reward learning.

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