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Country fiches on skills governance in the Member States

Malta

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1 Imbalances in the labour market

Over the past five years, the Maltese labour market continued to expand and the employment rate increased by 7 percentage points from 55.3 % in 2009 to 62.3 % in 2014 (Eurostat). Malta did not experience the strong difficulties faced by many European countries since the beginning of the financial crisis in 2008. Growth was mainly fuelled by women, whose employment rate increased by 11.3 percentage points reaching 49.3 % over the same period. On the other hand, the employment rate of men only increased by 3 percentage points and reached 74.9 % (Eurostat). The steady growth rate of female employment is in part attributable to government policy which focused on family friendly measures such as childcare, and financial assistance and training for women. Despite the positive trends, Malta's overall employment rate still lags behind the EU2020 target of 75 %. Malta's female employment rate, which is still considerably lower than the EU average of 59.6 % is predicted to reach 58 % by 2020 (Eurostat; Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d). Facilitated by government policies, the employment rate of older workers¹ increased from 29.1 % to 37.7 % over the examined period. Immigration also contributes to Malta's labour supply (Eurostat). There were around 1,200 foreign workers in Malta in 2014 (Times of Malta), often doing jobs that the Maltese are unwilling or unable to do.

Atypical work, especially among women, has continued to grow at a faster pace than typical work. Persons employed in a contract with limited duration increased from 5 % of all employed in 2009 to 7.7 % in 2014 (EU average of 14 % in 2014), while part-time workers increased from 11.5 % to 16.5 % (EU average of 20.5 % in 2014).

The increase in the employment rate is partly attributable to the 7.7 % growth of the public sector, from 40,764 in 2009 to 43,911 in 2014, which goes against declared government policy. This included a hefty 4.7 % increase between December 2013 and December 2014 (National Statistics Office, NSO, 2010a, 2015a). Over the past five years, the private sector also continued to expand, increasing the number of workers by 14.8 % (from 104,012 in 2009 to 119,433 in 2014) (NSO, 2010a, 2015a). Several sectors recruited more workers between 2009 and 2014, such as wholesale and retail, accommodation and food services, and financial services sectors, while the manufacturing and construction sectors shrunk in size (NSO, 2010a, 2015a). The country is moving away from manufacturing and traditional employment sectors towards a more service-oriented economy. This shift is in line with a report of the then National Commission for Higher Education (NCHE, 2009) which included tourism, financial services and health services among the growing sectors in the coming years. According to the Central Bank of Malta (CBM, 2015), following a strong growth in 2013 and 2014, employment in both the private and public sectors is expected to increase more slowly in 2015 and 2016.

The structural changes in the Maltese economy are reflected in the prevalence of occupations in the labour market, with a general shift towards jobs requiring higher qualifications and skills. While the number of managers, professionals, service, clerical and skilled workers increased, the number of technical, crafts, plant and machine operators and elementary occupations workers decreased between the fourth quarters of 2009 and 2014 (NSO, 2010b, 2015b).

The unemployment rate in Malta is one of the lowest across the EU, shrinking from 6.9 % in 2009 to 5.9 % in 2014 and reaching a historical minimum since comparative data

¹ Calculated by dividing the number of persons in employment and aged 55 to 64 by the total population of the same age group.

started to be gathered in 2000 (Eurostat). However, such figures hide important elements in the profile of the unemployed. The long term unemployment rate² stood at 2.7 % in 2014, decreasing marginally from 2.9 % in 2009 (Eurostat). Structural unemployment may be attributed to skills mismatches in the labour market (CBM, 2013). In December 2014, about half (51 %) of the registered unemployed persons were searching for jobs that did not require post-secondary or tertiary qualifications, namely elementary occupations, plant and machine operators, sales workers and clerks (NSO, 2015c). While this figure has decreased by 11 percentage points from the 62 % of December 2009 (NSO, 2010c), it is still high and indicates potential mismatches in a labour market that is gearing itself for jobs with higher qualifications. It is also of concern that 46 % of the registered unemployed in December 2014 were aged 45 years or more, an increase of 7 percentage points from 39 % in December 2009 (NSO, 2010c, 2015c). The unemployment rates among tertiary education and upper secondary/postsecondary graduates in 2014 were a low 2.6 % and 3.7 % respectively, increasing to 9.1 % among persons with lower secondary education or less (Eurostat). The Central Bank of Malta (CBM, 2015) expects unemployment to remain at a low 5.8 % in 2015 and rise marginally in 2016. The job vacancy rate³ in 2014 was considerably higher in real estate, public administration and information and communication, than in transport and storage, manufacturing, accommodation and food services, and financial and insurance activities (Eurostat).

“The greatest recruitment difficulties in Malta appear within the health care, the financial and the ICT sectors” (European Commission, 2014, p.1). Major bottlenecks within highly-skilled jobs concern medical practitioners, nurses, and various specialisations in IT and in the financial sector. On the other hand, bottlenecks in the low-skilled jobs are often related to the hospitality industry (European Commission, 2014). The main reasons for skills imbalances leading to the above-mentioned bottlenecks vary from sector to sector. Malta’s ageing population and the widening of the healthcare sector boosted the demand for related professions. The supply of new graduates has been insufficient to meet demand – many young doctors migrate, whereas the capping of the intake in the university nursing course was also limiting its graduates. The rapid growth of the ICT and financial services industries in Malta was quicker than the growth of graduates in the respective fields. Through fiscal and other incentives, the government managed to attract considerable foreign direct investment in these sectors which led to qualification bottlenecks. On the other side of the qualifications and skills spectrum, the low working conditions in the hospitality industry appears to scare off potential workers (European Commission, 2014).

The main initiatives that are being taken to reduce imbalances in the labour market focus on the investment in education and training, including the upgrading of the infrastructure of post-secondary and tertiary institutions, the improvement of working conditions of highly needed occupations, and the recruitment from abroad of skilled and high skilled occupations (European Commission, 2014).

² Defined as the number of persons unemployed for 12 months or longer as a percentage of the labour force (i.e. economically active population).

³ Defined as the proportion of total vacant posts expressed as a percentage as follows: number of job vacancies * 100 / (number of occupied posts + number of job vacancies).

2 Production of labour market and skills intelligence

2.1 Forecasting capabilities

“There is no particular institutional mechanism dedicated specifically for the anticipation of skills needs in Malta” (National Commission for Further and Higher Education, NCFHE, 2013, p.19) and no coherent labour market and skills forecasting system is in place. Past policy recommendations aimed at centralising the gathering and dissemination of labour market and skills intelligence, such as the National Career Guidance Centre proposed in the ‘Career Guidance Policy and Strategy for Compulsory Schooling in Malta’ (Debono, Camilleri, Galea & Gravina, 2007), did not materialise.

A number of institutions produce and disseminate statistics indicating trends in education and work. The National Statistics Office (NSO) regularly publishes data about education and labour market trends in Malta, using different methodologies including surveys based on international methodologies and criteria, and administrative data derived from entities such as the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC, Malta’s public employment service organisation), and educational institutions. The ETC also gathers data about job vacancies which is not published. The NCFHE produces statistics about students in post-secondary and tertiary education. The Student Services Department within the Ministry for Education and Employment publishes annual tracer study reports about the education and work choices of young persons after finishing compulsory education. Over the last 15 years, the University of Malta has also carried out a number of studies of the career outcomes of its graduates, some of which are published online (e.g. Debono, 2013). Similar studies have also been carried out among the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology graduates (e.g. MCAST, 2014). These types of instruments are useful to establish trends, but are not particularly accurate in predicting future labour market or skills needs.

Few forecasting mechanisms of labour market or skills needs exist in Malta. The Central Bank of Malta (CBM) publishes ‘Quarterly Reviews’ about the economy which include general labour market forecasts based on business and consumer surveys carried out regularly among organisations in the private sector (derived from the European Commission). The reviews include information about business confidence and employment prospects over the subsequent three months in the manufacturing, construction and services sectors. The CBM also publishes longer term macro-economic projections (e.g. the ‘Economic Projections for 2015 and 2016’ published in 2015) which include the expected future trends in the labour market. EY (formerly known as Ernst and Young) publishes an annual ‘Attractiveness Survey’ describing the projections of existing foreign investors for the next years. A main problem with this data produced by the CBM and EY is that it is too generic and does not shed sufficient light on specific future skill needs.

The ETC used to publish a biannual ‘Employment Barometer’ report examining the projected short-term labour market needs for specific occupational categories. However, it was discontinued in 2006 due to the difficulties in collecting forecasts from micro and small enterprises, the rapid economic changes taking place which made predictions difficult, and the ability to collect information about future skill needs from stakeholders in other informal ways (European Commission, 2014). Besides, “the utility of this tool was limited, as the six-month prediction could only provide time to train people for low-skilled jobs” (Debono, 2008, p.5).

In line with what was reported seven years earlier by Debono (2008), the forecasting of labour market and skills intelligence in 2015 continues to be carried out mostly through uncoordinated ad hoc one-off studies. These often deal with the skills required

in a particular economic sector and form part of exercises meant to develop specific policies or strategies (Debono, 2008). Several of these reports are now dated, but some are still valid. The 'Skills for the Future – Report on Skills for the Future' (NCHE, 2009) forecasted the skill needs for the ensuing decade in seven important sectors for the Maltese economy. A 'Human Resources Strategy for Gozo' (Cordina, 2011), examined human resources supply and demand in Gozo. Suban and Zammit (2011) drafted a report about satisfying labour demand through migration in Malta. A skill gap analysis about the green construction industry in Malta in view of the 2020 energy targets was published in 2013 by the Malta Chamber Foundation. The NCFHE is currently drafting a survey on Employee Skills Gaps, which it intends to launch in the second half of 2015.

Some other studies focused more on the supply side, by shedding light on the availability of skills among specific groups of the population. For example, the National Commission for the Promotion of Equality (NCPE, 2012) analysed the skills of the inactive female population. In 2011, the government concluded inventories of human resource skills in the public service and in public sector entities (Office of the Prime Minister, 2011a, 2011b).

Most of the labour market and skills intelligence in Malta is produced by organisations in the public sector, with some exceptions of instruments being developed by social partners, nongovernment organisations and the private sector. ESF funds have been used in the production of a number of reports regarding skills supply and needs. The existing instruments are useful but not sufficient to assess labour market and skill needs. Research is often carried out sporadically, while regular research is too generic to inform the design of education and training. As will be discussed later, to-date, the design of education and training in Malta tends to be steered in other ways, through direct formal and informal interaction with stakeholders.

Due to the small nature of Malta's open economy which is characterised by fast-changing and unpredictable developments, it is particularly difficult to forecast long-term future skills needs. Having said that, the government recently announced several plans to improve the production of labour market and skills intelligence in a bid to "identify emerging trends at sectoral level and anticipate the corresponding skills that are required" (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d, p.51).

A 'Skills Council', composed of social partners and experts, shall be established under the NCFHE in order to identify arising skill shortages and update the training strategy accordingly (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d). The setting up of such council was also announced by the previous government back in 2011, but never materialised. The ETC will set up an 'Employability Index', that was originally proposed by the Malta Employers Association back in 2010 (Times of Malta), meant to guide students on the types of jobs available for different qualifications. "The index can provide useful information such as the employability probability of a student after a specified time period, the probability of underemployment and the average income" (Ministry for Finance, 2015, Annex 2). The measure is expected to start in 2015. The ETC will also set up a 'Skills Bank' that will collect information about skills possessed by youths from public and private education and training institutions. The issuing of Legal Notice 19 of 2015 regulating the processing of student data is said to be a step forward in the establishment of both Employability Index and Skills Bank. Finally, the ETC is in the process of drafting a survey, to be distributed among employers in 2015, that will collect "information on occupations, skills, qualifications and competences needed in the labour market" (Ministry for Finance, 2015, Annex 2). While the planned frequency of such exercise has not been disclosed, it is hoped that it will be carried out on a regular basis. If these various initiatives are carried out successfully, a more coherent picture will start

to be built of the current and future skills supply and needs. The data generated could be very useful both for policy making and to guide persons of all ages in their career choices.

2.2 Transmission and use of information

Most of the existing labour market and skills intelligence data is available online. However, some reports are difficult to find, such as the skills reports of the public sector. Other reports were not published, such as the human resource policy for Gozo, and the MCAST tracer study. The same goes for the detailed vacancies regularly gathered by the ETC.

The production of labour market and skills data has different uses, depending on the type of instrument. As stated earlier, trends and forecasting data is at times collected as part of specific exercises meant to develop particular policies or strategies. The NCHE's report about skill needs has informed several government policies and strategies. Some reports are meant to promote specific social groups such as the integration of inactive women (e.g. NCPE, 2012) and migrants (e.g. Suban & Zammit, 2011) in paid employment. Considerable statistical data generated by the NSO is produced in order to fulfil EU obligations and feeds into Eurostat. Such data, including statistics about labour market and educational trends, is used regularly by policy makers in Malta. While it is also occasionally referred to in articles published in local media, its full potential is not exploited. For example, it tends not to be used by educational providers or career practitioners as it does not easily lend itself to interpretations that can be helpful to practitioners who deal with students or people in need of career advice.

Other instruments were developed for different end users. For example, the 'Attractiveness Surveys' are meant to help foreign businesses to make investment decisions while at the same time enable governments to remove barriers to growth (e.g. EY, 2014). The skills profiling reports of the public sector were meant to benefit management by helping it identify skills gaps and measures to bridge such gaps. Besides, employees were meant to "benefit from better opportunities for their own self development, higher satisfaction and motivation at their place of work, and higher employability" (Office of the Prime Minister, 2011b, p.2). However, the extent to which further action was taken to reach such goals is unknown.

It appears that while policy makers make regular use of the existing skills forecasting instruments, such information is not much used in the development of education and training courses or by practitioners who assist individuals in their career development needs. As will be discussed later on, the labour market needs in Malta are often conveyed to education and training developers and career guidance practitioners through formal and informal interaction with employers and other stakeholders. It is hoped that the above-mentioned initiatives recently announced by the government will provide relevant data that can assist and improve the work of such practitioners.

3 Steering the education and training provision

3.1 Policies and programmes

The current government identified the topic of addressing skills shortages and skills gaps among its top priorities (Ministry for Finance, 2014) and launched several policy strategies and measures aimed to better align education and training to the world of work. These initiatives concern the provision of education and training from compulsory to post-secondary and tertiary levels, and are guided by the 'Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta for 2014 to 2024' which is meant "to ensure that all children, young people and adults have the opportunity to obtain the necessary skills

and attitudes to be active citizens and to succeed at work and in society” (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b p.3).

The ‘Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy 2020’ (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014c) has five strategic objectives, namely to stimulate participation in lifelong Learning, to place the learner at the centre, to improve skills sets, to develop support structures, and to improve governance. The document acknowledges the need to align lifelong learning with employment needs in a bid to improve individuals’ employment flexibility and consequently their life chances. The strategic measures meant to achieve this goal include the consultation of trade unions and employers in order to improve the relevance of education and training, the strengthening of career guidance system in Malta, the use of digital technologies to increase the responsiveness to labour market needs, the development of key competences that are useful in all occupations, the reduction of training costs by among others encouraging training partnerships among larger and small businesses, and the facilitation of transition courses that help people to move out of declining economic sectors and join emerging ones.

Several initiatives were recently rolled out to address the problem of the high early school-leaving rate in Malta. The document ‘A strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta’ (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a) includes measures meant to increase literacy levels and introducing vocational education and training (VET) subjects in secondary schools. As part of the ‘Youth Guarantee’ initiative, which is being implemented across the EU, the Maltese government is increasing the employment skills of young persons who are not in education, employment or training. An alternative learning programme is being carried out “to provide alternative learning pathways for form 5 students not sitting for any SEC examinations” (Ministry for Finance, 2014, Annex 1).

The ‘Higher Education Strategy for Malta’ (NCFHE, 2014) focuses on four priority areas for action, namely, increasing participation and attainment, reducing gender differences, encouraging innovative content and programme design, and increasing employability and entrepreneurship. The strategy gives considerable importance to the aspect of research in order to steer the education and training provision. It recommends the need to “sustain regular data collection on participation, attainment and the social dimension” (p.23) of higher education (HE), to “undertake graduate employability research” (p.28) and to “undertake research on skills supply and demand” which provides “data on the development of the labour market and different sectors of the economy as well as on the specific knowledge, skills and competences desired from prospective employees” (p.27). The strategy states that this information will assist HE institutions to align their courses to the labour market and will also help employers to develop their businesses.

The ‘National Vocational Education and Training Policy’ (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2015), tasked with establishing a way forward in Malta’s VET system, acknowledges that there exist insufficient tools to anticipate labour needs and puts forward a number of suggestions meant to improve the gathering and dissemination of relevant data. These include the setting up of a national tracer study system that gathers data for both policy makers and career guidance services, and a longitudinal nationwide systematic skills gaps analysis. The policy also points out the need to invest in ICT resources that can facilitate data collection and analysis.

Apart from the above-mentioned policies and strategies, throughout the years there have been diverse projects and initiatives aiming at promoting particular subjects within the educational system, such as entrepreneurship projects or campaigns promoting science for female students. The eSkills Foundation set up by government in 2014 in

order “to create the skills base and life-long quality growth required for a digitally enabled knowledge economy” includes the promotion of eSkills campaigns in its mandate (Times of Malta). Looking to the future, the proposed development of a ‘National Interactive Science Centre’ which will be co-financed by EU funds, is meant to include hands-on science exhibits and to encourage scientific research. The centre aims “to entice students to take up science subjects at school as well as to bring science closer to the general public” (Ministry for Finance, 2015, Annex 2). Besides, initiatives meant to promote specialized occupations such as the announced Aerospace Centre and the Life Sciences Park, which is in a more advanced stage of completion, may also motivate students towards specific economic sectors of growing importance in Malta.

The discussed policy strategies show thorough awareness of the weaknesses of the links between education and training and the labour market. However, there isn’t yet enough synergy in the efforts to ensure a better alignment of education and training to the labour market.

3.2 Financial incentives

Over the years, aided by European funds, subsequent governments have directed considerable financial incentives to steer HE and VET. Apart from the substantial investments channelled to improve educational infrastructure, several different financial incentives have also been set up to encourage particular social groups (such as single parents or old unemployed persons) to get training or employers to train employees. These incentives are often meant to increase the overall education and training levels, without being specifically linked to particular subjects or courses. However, a number of incentives for students and employers are meant to boost skills in specific disciplines.

The ‘maintenance grant system’ (also known as the ‘stipend system’) is an important characteristic of Malta’s HE and VET. The system, introduced nearly thirty years ago, is meant to encourage more students to further their education beyond compulsory schooling into approved post-secondary and VET institutions. Over the years, this system helped thousands of students who would have otherwise been unable to achieve HE qualifications. Students who are Maltese or European Citizens, who have resided in Malta for a minimum of five years prior to the beginning of the course and have completed compulsory education are entitled to a stipend. Students pursuing degree courses have slightly better maintenance grants than those attending courses in pursuit of lower qualifications, amounting to EUR 1,320 per year plus a one-time grant of EUR 466. The government also selected a number of degree courses which entitle students to receive a higher grant of EUR 2,194 per year, plus a one-time grant of EUR 698. Through this system, the government aims to attract more students towards sciences (including IT and engineering), nursing and midwifery. Mature students are also allowed to receive the maintenance grant if they are the principal breadwinners in their household or if the course of studies applied for is reasonably expected to improve their employment prospects. Students are also entitled to a supplementary maintenance grant if they suffer from proven hardships as decided by the Student Maintenance Grants Board. According to 2014 Budget the students’ stipends would be increased pro-rata every year to compensate for cost of living increases (Times of Malta).

Subsequent governments have promoted further education in specific areas of study through various scholarship schemes. The ‘Get Qualified’ scheme, ‘My Potential’, ‘Master it!’, and ‘Malta Government Scholarship Scheme – Undergraduate and Postgraduate’, are some of the recent schemes. The government also aims to launch a new scholarship scheme called ‘Endeavour’ targeted at levels 7 and 8 and another one called ‘Reach High Scholars Programme’ for postdoctoral students in 2015 (Ministry for Finance, 2015). The ETC recently organised two similar schemes for its clients, namely, the Training

Subsidy Scheme (TSS) for short accredited training “leading to the acquisition of transferable vocational skills” (ETC Website) and the Training Subsidy Scheme for Academic Training (TSSA), meant to “encourage and promote more participation in programmes where there is a high demand by employers” (ETC Website). Several of these schemes are co-financed through EU funds.

The apprenticeship system in Malta which includes two types of schemes and is based on a combination of on- and off-the-job training, passed under the responsibility of MCAST in 2014. The system is being revamped in order to better address skills gaps and increase the labour market relevance of VET. The reform also aims to make apprenticeships more attractive to both students and employers. “The government drafted a legal notice to reform the national apprenticeship schemes with the aim of creating a single national apprenticeship scheme covering more qualification levels” (Ministry for Finance, 2015, p.4). As from 2014, entrepreneurs are being encouraged to offer apprenticeships placements against a tax deduction of €1,200 per placement (Ministry for Finance, 2015, Annex 2). This incentive system coupled by MCAST’s outreach program towards employers which “aims at identifying the existing skills-gap to develop new apprenticeships where needed and at meeting the needs of the industry” (European Commission, 2015, p. 2), has already been successful at involving some 400 companies (European Commission, 2015). Meanwhile, MCAST is improving the apprenticeship system by making it available across more courses and subjects, adapting it to the requirements of the different sectors and making it more compact in length (Ministry for Finance, 2015, Annex 2).

It is clear that the financial incentives associated with maintenance grants, scholarships and apprenticeships have achieved considerable results in encouraging the uptake of particular HE and VET courses. However, though politically sensitive, there needs to be a thorough evaluation of the maintenance grants, as the dead weight of the system appears to have increased considerably over the years. Similarly, the relevant authorities should re-evaluate the scholarship schemes against their results, and consider including the applicants’ financial means as part of the selection criteria. The government might not always be getting the best value for money through these financial incentives.

4 Career and vocational guidance

Career guidance in Malta is well established within the educational sector. The career guidance services forming part of the government’s Education Psycho-Social Services aim to assist students within the compulsory education system to make more informed career choices in their transitions from primary to secondary schools, and from secondary to post-secondary educational institutions and/or work (Eurydice Website). Career guidance practitioners are also present in HE and VET institutions.

Within compulsory education, career guidance is offered on a one-to-one basis or in groups mainly by guidance teachers and career advisors. Contact with representatives of employers, HE, VET and other important stakeholders is maintained through career exhibitions, seminars, fairs and conventions that are organised regularly at school, college and national level. These stakeholders are also invited by schools to give talks to students. Besides, career orientation visits and job shadowing are organised for students in Forms 4 and 5, the last two years of secondary education. Career guidance within compulsory schools is complemented by career education which forms part of the Personal, Social and Career Development (PSCD) subject. Career assistance is also offered in the main post-secondary, vocational and tertiary educational institutions. However, it tends not to be offered within ETC, which focuses mainly on training and job placement rather than on career development.

Many persons who work in the career guidance field in Malta completed specialised career guidance courses at the University of Malta, namely the Diploma in Occupational Guidance and Career Counselling, and more recently, the Post-Graduate Diploma in Lifelong Career Guidance and Development. Some also completed Master's courses with foreign universities. The 'Career Guidance Capacity Building' scheme offered a few years ago assisted several practitioners to further their studies in the field. Practitioners with the above qualifications are normally trained to interpret data deriving from forecasting instruments. However, many practitioners in the field working both in educational institutions and at the ETC do not have formal qualifications in career guidance. Many guidance teachers do not even have a social science background. Career practitioners without formal training in the field might be less able and willing to use labour market and skills intelligence. Having said that, career practitioners within compulsory education participate in continuous professional development activities offered by government. Besides, all career practitioners can benefit from activities organised by the Malta Career Guidance Association.

While career practitioners are not supposed to channel students into specific educational or vocational routes, as mentioned in Section 3, the government tries to steer young students towards specific subjects. For example, within primary schools, higher priority is being given to subjects related to Mathematics, Science and ICT. The learning programmes of these subjects are being reviewed, teachers are being trained in Mathematics, Science and Digital Science teaching and learning, science lessons will be increased and digital science will be introduced in primary schools. A pilot project is being carried out to evaluate the introducing tablet computing devices in all primary schools, as a means of improving literacy, numeracy skills and digital literacy. Besides, science popularisation events are planned to be held in primary and secondary schools (Ministry for Finance, 2015).

Considerable career guidance work is being carried out in the educational system, but there needs to be a more cohesive approach, aided by better labour market and skills intelligence, so that high quality services are consistently provided to students. Besides, career guidance should be developed to cater for the lifelong career needs of the population.

5 Stakeholders in steering education and training provisions

HE and VET providers, social partners, the ETC, policy makers and other stakeholders are involved in diverse ways in shaping the education and training provisions in line with Malta's labour market needs. Plenty of opportunities exist for the main stakeholders to meet both formally and informally and discuss such themes, normally at a national level. For example, stakeholders are regularly invited to attend national conferences about education and training or the labour market.

The major HE and VET providers have other stakeholders on their Boards. The Board of Governors of MCAST and the Board of Directors of ETC, appointed by the Minister for Education and Employment, both included representatives of social partners over the years (NCFHE, 2013; Debono, 2015). The Council of the University of Malta includes "members appointed by the Prime Minister from among the leading representatives of the economic, industrial and social fields, to represent the general interest of the country" (Government of Malta, 1988, p.46). Thus, stakeholders are directly involved in the formulation of these institutions' policies and strategies. At the level of planning and reviewing specific courses, the above-mentioned institutions involve other stakeholders in different ways and to varying extents. ETC holds meetings with employers to ensure that its courses are in line with labour market needs, and many of its courses were prompted by and developed with the help of employers (Debono,

2015). MCAST also gives considerable importance to fostering links with employers, and over the past year, it signed cooperation agreements with organisations such as EY, Lufthansa Technik, Armed Forces Malta, Intelligent Energy Management Agency, and Banif Bank. Besides it keeps links with hundreds of employers who offer apprenticeship placements. Malta Enterprise, the national development agency responsible for promoting and facilitating international investment in Malta has recently collaborated on the development of new courses with ETC, MCAST, and the Institute of Tourism Studies (ITS) (Ministry for Finance, 2015). While the University of Malta has also signed collaborations with stakeholders, perhaps due to its institutional set up and the nature of its courses, it appears slower than other major education and training institutions to adapt to the changing skills needs.

The most organised social partners carry out training courses for their members according to the arising needs. The GWU, Malta's largest union, has an educational branch called Reggie Miller Foundation which organises training courses in collaboration with stakeholders such as the ETC and the University of Malta. The UHM, Malta's second largest union organises courses through its Salvinu Spiteri Foundation, and has recently availed itself of EU funds for this purpose. The Malta Employers' Association also organises regular courses for its members.

At a macro policy level, social partners and other stakeholders publish policy proposals from time to time. In particular, they submit to government annual pre-budget proposals and pre-elections proposals every five years. These documents often include recommendations on education and training. The major social partners are also represented on the Malta Council for Economic and Social Development (MCESD), the country's highest forum for tripartite concertation, where issues relating to education and training are among the topics discussed. In 2013, social partners represented on the MCESD together with the main political parties signed a labour market policy document drafted by the Union Haddiema Maghqudin (UHM, 2012) in which they agreed to a number of measures focusing among others on the improvement of existing skills and the anticipation of future skills needs.

It is clear that in general, stakeholders are strongly involved in steering education and training in Malta at various levels and in different ways.

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