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IMPLEMENTING THE 'EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2010'

WORK PROGRAMME

2005 Progress Report



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National Education and Training Work Programme 2010 Interim Report

on the objectives of education and training systems

Malta - Progress Report 2005

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1. Introduction: The development of national policies and the Lisbon Agenda

Malta has been aware of the Council conclusions (5 May 2003) as regards average performance in education and training (Benchmarks) (2003C 134/02) before its accession to the European Union in May 2004. During the last two decades, at least, Malta has been consistently adopting and intensifying policies implementing the principle of a 'knowledge-based society'. In fact, there is a national consensus on the fact that education and training are major contributors towards economic, personal and social development and social cohesion as well as the basis for a competitive economy and sustainable growth. Throughout this period, investment in education has consistently been on the increase and often even higher than the European Union average compared with the member states' GDP. Currently, education and training within a lifelong learning context and culture is at the top of the national agenda not simply the prime movers of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment.

The Lisbon - and Malta - targets for education and training have been extensively publicised during the last few years through information sharing and the media. Conferences and study sessions specifically brought together both the educators and parents as well as other stakeholders. Parliament itself often refers to education and training targets within the overall context of the Lisbon Agenda.

Following the publication in the year 2000 of a new National Framework Curriculum for pre-school and compulsory education, formulated following extensive consultations with all stakeholders and obtaining a national consensus, the Ministry of Education has been undertaking an in-depth review of the major sectors of education, including early childhood education, special and inclusive education, lifelong education, the matriculation and secondary education certificate examinations, career guidance, absenteeism, lifelong learning, adult basic skills, education and training, internal and external school evaluation, state higher education funding and its impact on quality education. These studies by expert working groups obviously take into consideration the Lisbon targets for education and training. These reports were intended to analyse the current situation in the different sectors and at the various levels and indicate the way forward within a European and world context.

The Ministry of Education is discussing with the various stakeholders important reforms and restructuring in the primary and secondary system of education, changes that are intended to bring about more smooth transitions between the various stages of education and large scale networking between schools, both vertically and horizontally, in order to promote the pooling and sharing of ideas and experiences and to stimulate mutual professional support. The child as well as the nation's development is at the centre of the envisaged reform. The proposed reforms will be encapsulated in a new Education Act that should indicate the way forward in education and training.

At the same time, government has been investing in the upgrading and refurbishment of schools in order to provide the appropriate educational environment for the implementation of the philosophy, the values and objectives of the National Framework Curriculum published in the year 2000 and to eventually turn schools into community learning and cultural centres.

Although the compulsory school leaving age is legally still between the age of 5 and up to the age of 16, practically all children start attending kindergartens at the age of 3 and

action is being taken to substantially increase the provision of nursery education in order to ensure a solid start in education especially for children who may be somehow disadvantaged. At the same time, leaving school at the age of 16 is being discouraged while students are being incentivised to continue with their studies, at least up to the age of 18 but possibly beyond. The figures of the last five years clearly indicate that the policy is being very successful¹.

There has been a massive increase in the number of students attending post-compulsory education courses, primarily at the university during the last 15 years as well as at the major vocational education and training institutions during the last 4 years following determined and intensively planned measures implementing specific policies and directions taken by Government. Moreover, part-time and evening courses have become very attractive to various sectors of society. Distance learning, primarily with foreign institutions, is growing regularly. Outstanding seems to be the number of students, generally adults already in employment, who are obtaining masters degrees, including Masters in Business Administration.

Female participation in higher education has now surpassed the number of males at the university but it is still rather low in vocational education and training areas traditionally occupied by men (e.g. engineering and sciences) while still high in the other areas traditionally associated with women (e.g. secretarial and nursing). The number of students following courses in mathematics and science is still comparatively low but growing, even among female students. The number of male students attending technology courses at the different levels is continuously on the increase but there is still more room for expansion.

Hence, more importance is being given to the teaching of science and technology in primary and secondary schools. In secondary schools, all students study general science during the first two years and physics during the last three years. Additionally, during the last three years they can opt also to study either chemistry or biology or both. Technology is gradually becoming an important core subject at secondary education level and government has been investing in appropriate workshops and in the training of teachers in the methodology of technology teaching and resource production. Information and communication technology has been phased into both primary and secondary education during the last decade and today all primary classes have a number of computers and all secondary schools are well equipped with computer laboratories. All computers are interconnected through Internet. Again, large scale training of teachers has been organised in order to ensure that information technology will eventually become common teaching and learning tools. And more teacher training still needs to be done in both technology and ICT in order to exploit the current investment to the full.

Lifelong learning has been the overarching aim of all initiatives that are being taken by the government. The ministry responsible for education is the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment. Hence, it is necessarily committed to lifelong learning since it covers formal education at all levels and in all areas as well the training of persons of any age looking for employment through the national employment agency, the Employment and Training Corporation, which provides a series of courses itself and collaborates with other education and training institutions in order to satisfy the needs of both industry and

¹ Note figures shown in Section 4

persons in search of employment. Hence, the same ministry is made conscious of the successes as well as the failings of the national education system.

However, there is a number of providers of formal and non-formal education and training courses within the lifelong learning context. Perhaps industry should be making a more significant contribution to training and at the same time facilitate the training of young people through a more enthusiastic participation in apprenticeship schemes. The tendency of industry is often to expect to engage readily trained personnel with as little need of induction training as possible. Commercial education and training institutions are becoming increasingly popular in providing specialised courses. Non-government organisations (NGO's) offer a range of opportunities for informal and non-formal education and training.

2. Investing more and more effectively: focusing reform on the key areas

Since 2003, Government has put education, including vocational training, the economy, including employment, and the environment, as the main targets for major development at the national level. As a result, substantial financial resources have been allocated to these three basic areas for sustainable development in a highly competitive world. A substantial share of the European Union social funds and structural funds received by Malta as an Objective One member state are being invested in these crucial areas.

In education, vocational education and training, primarily provided by the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology and, to a lesser extent by the Institute for Tourism Studies and the Employment and Training Corporation, have received a significant boost through specific funding in areas that are directly relevant to the growth of the Maltese economy. Government had invested heavily in the University since the late 1980's and the fruit of its investment is now very tangible since the number of students has increased nearly tenfold since then.

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), established in 2001, has brought together within one overall management but leaving each Institute to develop its own particular ethos, a number of existing institutes and set up the new Institute for Information and Communication Technology. Heavy investment in an enlarged campus and in the provision of modern equipment and facilities together with the recruitment of appropriately qualified teaching staff, has resulted in a big increase in the range of courses offered at the different levels, and a very substantial increase in the number of students². Moreover, courses organised by MCAST are more industry and services oriented.

The University and the MCAST as well as the Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS) and the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) are flexibly responding to the demands of a changing economy that is still restructuring while trying to attract new industries. At the same time, they are providing for the needs of the young people as well as to the unemployed or those persons who intend to change their job or career. Worth mentioning in this context is the Institute for Restoration and Conservation Studies within the Malta Centre for Restoration which, though not attracting a large number of students, is providing specialised courses that could supply the required skills for the

² Note relevant data in Section 4

restoration and conservation of the huge amount of historical buildings and monuments, artefacts and art that embellish the islands with a history that goes back to over six thousand years.

Government has promoted and stimulated education and training, primarily among young people but also among adults, through the provision of free courses or courses that are heavily subsidised, and through financial support and incentives. Post-secondary and higher education are largely free of charge and students may often qualify for maintenance grants. However, these provisions are currently being studied for their impact and sustainability³.

Besides the post-secondary and higher education institutions, the Education Division provides a long list of courses, generally at a nominal fee, to satisfy the demand for basic or further study of curriculum subjects at secondary or post-secondary education level as well as the request for courses in specific skills and competencies, or in art, craft, music, drama and sport. Many of the courses prepare students for specific examinations, many others do not.

One may consider the current courses provided by the post-secondary and higher education institutions as covering most if not all the areas required by the changing economy. The institutions involved try, generally successfully, to cater for the emerging needs of the economy, particularly to satisfy new demands coming from industry, commerce and the services.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment has been investing in the implementation of the National Framework Curriculum in order to implement its innovatory philosophy, values and objectives which should ensure that each and every student leaves school with the basic knowledge, skills, competencies and values as the foundation for lifelong and lifewide education. Investment has gone as well in the in-service training of teachers and in the provision of resources, facilities and services. Supplementary support to teachers and schools is being provided both through complementary teachers in the basic subjects as well as through the setting up of the Foundation for Educational Services (FES) which provides professional support after normal school hours for children with literacy, numeracy or particular problems. The FES works closely with parents and implements innovative approaches to teaching and learning. Moreover, children with special intellectual, emotional and physical needs are provided with the support of a qualified facilitator within the policy of an all-inclusive system of education. An Individual Educational Programme (IEP) tries to satisfy the particular entitlement of pupils with special needs. Most facilitators have received their training through courses paid for by the ministry. Although special schools still function, they are increasingly becoming resource centres for children with serious disabilities who are expected to fare better if provided with special facilities and care.

Reference has already been made to the implementation of Information and Communication Technology in both primary and secondary schools. All state primary schools have been provided with a pupil : computer ratio of 7 : 1 set up in every class and with the appropriate apparatus and a computer and software for each teacher. Secondary schools have well equipped computer laboratories supplied with appropriate software. The aim is eventually to teach and learn through information and communication

³ Report referred to more extensively in Section 4

technology as a main vehicle. Trained peripatetic teachers prepare software according to subject and level and test their validity in schools. All computers are interconnected through Internet and each student has been provided with an email address and the possibility of a web-page. At the end of the secondary education course each student can qualify for the European Computer Driving Licence (ECDL). ECDL courses have been offered to all teachers free of charge in order to further enhance the IT literacy of teachers at all levels.

Secondary schools have been provided with technology workshops that are appropriately equipped with the necessary machines and materials. The curriculum and the related methodology are expected to make the subject attractive and to encourage students to take a vocational course later on. Teachers of Technology have received ample in-service training to update them particularly in the creating, design and make methodology.

In-service education and training of teachers is given its due importance. In fact, according to their collective agreement they are expected to participate in a three-day course organised by the Education Division annually at school or elsewhere, while they participate in in school meetings as part of their professional, curriculum or school development process.

Internal school self-evaluation according to the school's own development plan is becoming increasingly effective while preparations are in hand to develop external school evaluation which should ensure that quality education is delivered by teachers and every student receives his / her entitlement.

In order to provide the appropriate educational environment, the government, through the Foundation for Tomorrow's Schools, has formulated a ten-year strategic plan for school building, maintenance, refurbishment and embellishment that should gradually transform the existing schools into attractive and functional learning establishments. The school building and its environment are being considered as an integral contribution to the delivery of the National Framework Curriculum. Moreover, the plan is also intended to facilitate the use of the school as community learning, social, cultural and recreational centre in order to exploit to the full the potential of the school buildings, spaces and facilities within the overarching philosophy and strategy of lifelong learning.

Every effort is being made to ensure quality and value-for-money. Internal and external audits analyse projects and programmes regularly. ERDF and ESF are contributing to the implementation of specific projects and programmes. New facilities are being built or improved. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology has been a primary beneficiary and the EU funding has further boosted its accelerated growth and the number of students following vocational education and training courses. Courses in various fields are being organised to train or retrain young people and adults, in employment or unemployed, new to the labour market or long-term unemployed. Emphasis is being laid on the eradication of illiteracy, on the provision of basic skills to adults, on increasing female participation in the world of work, on including persons with special needs in the labour force, on the provision of child-care services.

The Business and Development Act (BDA) and the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) offer various financial incentives to employers and employees to further their vocational training and qualifications. The ETC, in addition to the substantial funds provided by government annually, is utilising allocations from the

European Social Fund in order to finance a number of schemes. All these initiatives require extensive funding.

3. Putting in place truly coherent and comprehensive lifelong learning strategies

Malta has had quite a long tradition of lifelong and lifewide learning, even though not to the extent and level expected and required today, both as a result of popular demand and as a consequence of the needs of industry and a restructuring economy. For several decades, the University, post-secondary state education and training institutions as well as commercial institutions and non-government organisations have provided a very large range of courses and activities covering very different areas of knowledge and skills as well as the arts, crafts, music and drama.

However, it has been increasingly felt that a much more structured and co-ordinated approach is needed in order to satisfy the demand of persons and of the economy. So far, one of the departments within the Ministry caters for further studies and adult education. But a formal lifelong learning policy and strategy is required and being developed.

Government has no doubt that lifelong and lifewide learning starts at kindergarten, perhaps even soon after birth at home and within the family environment and atmosphere. Hence, early childhood education and the provision of kindergarten, primary and secondary education are considered as foundation stones for the acquisition of the basic skills for future learning and personal growth, whether at academic or vocational level or both. The learning how to learn, self-directed learning and autonomous learning are the means for further personal development and keys to personal success in a career. There will hardly be any attempt at learning and training later on in life if the child is not equipped with literacy and numeracy, the ability to obtain and pass on information, the use information and communication technology, the ability to analyse, to plan, to execute, the evaluate, the ability to work in a team - as a leader, as a team player, the need to be creative and entrepreneurial. This knowledge and these skills are essential elements of the National Framework Curriculum which should be the companion of every educator. There is no doubt that a thorough change in the teaching and learning culture is required.

As indicated earlier, all the major post-secondary and higher education institutions contribute towards the provision of lifelong learning beyond compulsory school attendance age. They offer day, full-time courses and part-time day or evening courses, short term or long term courses, courses leading to certification from certificate to diploma to degree. The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology organises courses at its nine institutes from the very basic to the operative, craft, technician and diploma levels. Within the near future it may be delivering courses up to degree level. All courses are open to participants irrespective of age or gender. All that is required is the prior knowledge needed to be able to follow the course applied for.

The University, in addition to its range of courses offered by its ten faculties as well as its centres and institutes, holds courses at all levels. Although the University normally expects high entry qualifications from its applicants to ensure as few drop outs as possible, adults can apply as mature students who, although not in possession of the full admission qualifications, can prove that they can fruitfully follow the course they are applying for. The Malta University Services, an agency of the University, provides a

wide variety of usually short courses at different levels and in different areas, again open to everyone who can benefit from them.

The Employment and Training Corporation, through its training branch, organises a range of often short-term courses and collaborates with other post-secondary institutions for the provision of courses that are either requested by industry or are intended to provide skilled workers for perceived or anticipated needs. In this area it collaborates with Malta Enterprise, the agency that has as its mission to attract industry to the island. Together they strive to produce skilled workers for newly set up enterprises if such skilled workers are not already available.

However, the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), as stated earlier, caters for the long-term unemployed, for the unemployed who are still without basic knowledge or skills, for persons with special needs in search of employment, for females looking for work for the first time or returning to work following parental leave, for employed persons registering for a new employment. As expected, the ETC clients come from all age groups and with a varied background of knowledge, skills and experiences. Perhaps one of the best qualities of the ETC's training branch is its ability to respond flexibly and within a relatively short time to industry's demands. Besides, since the registering unemployed are interviewed in-depth about their qualifications, competencies and general background, the ETC is in the best position to know what knowledge and skills it should impart to these clients.

Foreign universities offering courses through local accredited agencies are sometimes even more generous with applicants as regards course admission requirements. They still have a significant number of students, even though their fees are generally much higher than those charged by the local higher education institutions. Although local courses rarely adopt elearning because of the proximity and easy accessibility of the local institutions, elearning is becoming increasingly popular with students following courses with overseas institutions.

The importance that IT is being given both at the national level and in educational institutions shows the relevance of IT knowledge and its potential for self-development and for the development of the nation and the economy. Government for several years has, therefore, been investing heavily in the IT infrastructure at the national level as well as in schools, strongly believing that IT is a cornerstone for the knowledge society. So much so, Government has established a number of partnerships with international IT providers and set up academies in order to further promote IT in all fields of business, government services and throughout life. Every effort is being made in order to remove or at least diminish as far as possible the divide between those who are IT literate and those who are not.

Computers, the Internet, email, ebusiness are all easily available and generally within the reach of all classes of society. The European Computer Driving Licence is gradually becoming a necessity, especially with the younger generation. Various courses in the use of the different software programmes are fairly accessible. One of the most popular Institutes at the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology is the Institute for Information and Communication Technology.

Many of the larger enterprises employing a fairly large or large number of employees either provide training for their employees in-house or they contract training to an external agency or institution. The small enterprises - and the vast majority of

enterprises in Malta are small - find difficulty in organising in-service training for their employees. The Government has its own Staff Development Organisation which organises several courses of particular interest to the various ministries and departments of government. The Ministry of Education has its own set up and facilities for the in-service training of teachers and school administrators. There are also organisations, generally organised on a commercial basis, at the national level that hold courses for any interested applicant.

One cannot stress enough the relevance of Non-Government Organisations in the development of a lifelong learning philosophy, strategy and culture. Participation in courses, meetings, lectures, seminars organised by NGO's is on a voluntary basis but the impact of such courses are equally fruitful. Although a number of NGO's work at the national level, each town and village, however small, is generally blessed with active groups, organisations, associations dedicated to sports, culture, drama, music, art, religion, social work and pastimes. Many NGO's are becoming increasingly conscious of the fact that they need to become more 'professional' in their approach.

One cannot ignore the role of the media, particularly the printed media, radio and television, in the provision of lifelong learning, generally in an informal manner. A number of television programmes on most local television channels aim at informing and educating, if not formally teaching, their audience in an entertaining way and they do contribute in a non-formal / informal way to lifelong learning. They probably reach a sector of the population very difficult to teach otherwise. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment has its own television channel which it adopts as a means and vehicle for lifelong learning, both in the direct imparting of knowledge and skills, and by publicising programmes and activities within a lifelong learning context organised elsewhere by the Ministry itself or by others.

A National Action Plan for Lifelong Learning in the pipeline should disseminate the philosophy of lifelong and lifewide learning and further co-ordinate and strengthen the existing lifelong learning provision and services.

4. Reforming higher education

Malta has two major higher education institutions. The University, owes its origins over 400 years ago but was raised to a university status in 1769. The University has ten faculties: Architecture and Civil Engineering; Arts; Dental Surgery; Economics; Management and Accountancy; Education; Engineering; Laws; Medicine and Surgery; Science, and Theology. A number of interdisciplinary institute and centres have been set up in various fields. The Institutes include such fields as Agriculture, Anglo-Italian Studies, Baroque Studies, Energy Technology, Forensic Studies, Health Care, Linguistics, Maltese Studies, Masonry and Construction Research, Public Administration and Management, Physical Education and Sport, Mediterranean Institute and Edward de Bono Institute for the Design and Development of Thinking. The Centres comprise: Centre for Communication Technology, European Centre for Gerontology, Euro-Mediterranean Centre for Educational Research, Labour Studies, and the European Documentation Centre (set up to serve as a repository of European Community documents as well as a resource centre for students and the general public). The University has established a University Centre in the sister island of Gozo in order to make it easier for young people and adults to follow a tertiary education course without have to cross to the main island. The University campus is also home for the Mediterranean Academy for Diplomatic Studies, the International Maritime Law

Institute and the International Ocean Institute Malta Operational Centre. Moreover, the University runs the University of the Third Age which attracts several hundred 'students' generally over 60 years of age.

The Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) was established in 2001. It eventually brought together and co-ordinated the courses already provided by a number of already existing institutions of a vocational and technical nature, expanded their services and enhanced their courses and introduced the Institute for Information and Communication Technology⁴.

There are also the Institute for Tourism Studies catering mainly for the professional education and training of personnel in the tourism industry and the Institute for Conservation and Restoration Studies within the Malta Centre for Restoration at post secondary and higher education levels. While the former provides short and long term courses for most of the careers and jobs in the field of tourism to a large number of students who intend to work in this major industry in Malta, the latter has a limited number of students, even though the vast artistic, architectural, archaeological and artefacts heritage of the islands can engage a large number of personnel.

The close relationship between Malta and Britain for over 160 years had a great influence on the development of the educational system of education in Malta. The impact can be very visible in the post-secondary and higher education sectors to this day. Most courses at these levels follow similar structures, content and duration. The fact that teaching is either through Maltese but primarily through English leads to the extensive use of English textbooks and other learning materials. The Malta University as well as the other institutions offering post-secondary courses have close links with British universities and other post-secondary education institutions, besides links with other institutions in other countries in Europe and throughout the world.

Specialists from foreign institutions are invited to evaluate the performance of students at their final exams as part of on-going quality assurance. These links and influences have, over the years, developed a tradition and to a great extent guaranteed that courses, certificates, diplomas and degrees awarded by the Maltese institutions are easily recognised abroad. Vocational institutions in Malta actually prepare students for certification from British institutions in a number of areas or have their certificates validated by British institutions. Maltese students who continue to further their studies abroad find no difficulty in adapting and obtaining good or excellent results.

Malta's membership of the European has facilitated more extensive links between the University of Malta and universities or groupings of universities throughout Europe, depending on the area of specialisation. Moreover, the University has established a number of international links with various countries in the world. These ongoing contacts are essential for a small country like Malta in order to avoid any possibility of isolation and to remain constantly au courant with main stream studies and research.

The current situation facilitates Malta's participation in the Bologna process as well as in the Copenhagen process as well as its contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon targets for post-secondary and higher education. The University has introduced the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) across undergraduate courses, except in the

⁴ More details about MCAST are given in Section 5 on VET

case of Medicine and Dentistry. The diploma supplement will be issued to graduates. As a result of the Erasmus (Socrates) programme students can attend part of their course in a foreign university and have the term of study as well as the credits obtained recognised by their university. Vocational students are similarly benefiting from participation in Leonardo da Vinci programme.

The University's Quality Assurance Committee has strengthened its existing quality assurance system. Action is being taken to implement a more stringent external quality assurance process. It may not be possible to establish an independent National Quality Assurance agency in view of Malta's size. Hence collaboration with such European agencies may be sought. The University supports its teaching staff, primarily through a work resources scheme and an academic supplement, to attain the highest possible academic qualifications.

The Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Act⁵ has come into effect and related Legal Notices were published effecting the Mutual Recognition of Professional Education and Training Regulations, and the Mutual Recognition of Professional Activities. The Malta Qualifications Recognition Information Centre (the Malta NARIC/ENIC) as well as the Mutual Recognition of Qualifications Appeals Board have been set up. The institutions and their regulations facilitate the comparability of professional and academic and vocational qualifications obtained from different higher education institutions in different countries.

The Malta Professional and Vocational Qualifications Awards Council needs to be further strengthened and provide standards setting boards and assessment boards on a large scale in order to facilitate the comparability of local with foreign qualifications in the areas for which the Council is responsible. Malta has set up the Euroguidance network to assist Maltese and European Union students and workers in their search for vocational / academic education and training in the EU or Malta.

The University of Malta attracts about 500 foreign students out of over 9,000 students, about 5% of the student population.

Foreign universities are delivering a limited number of courses through elearning with the support of local agencies. They are attracting a significant number of students, particularly where they ask for lower entry qualifications than those expected by the University of Malta.

The following figures are indicative of the success story of post-secondary and higher education in Malta during the recent past:

Day course student population in post-secondary and higher education

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Post Secondary (General)	3723	3872	3250	4438	5185	5033	5191	5122	4970	5169	5339

⁵ Act Number XVIII of 2002

Post Secondary (Vocational)	1748	1362	1423	1621	1841	1917	2615	2801	3638	3858	4473
Tertiary	4728	5166	5637	5770	6183	6064	5554	6281	5852	6692	7248
Total day course student population	10199	10400	10310	11829	13209	13014	13360	14204	14460	15719	17060

Evening course student population in higher education

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Tertiary	449	639	626	598	963	895	808	1212	1480	2314	1997

Total day and evening course student population in higher education

Year	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Post Secondary (General)	3723	3872	3250	4438	5185	5033	5191	5122	4970	5169	5339
Post Secondary (Vocational)	1748	1362	1423	1621	1841	1917	2615	2801	3638	3858	4473
Tertiary (Day and Evening)	5177	5805	6263	6368	7146	6959	6362	7493	7332	9006	9245
Total day course student population	10648	11039	10936	12427	14172	13909	14168	15416	15940	18033	19057

Female proportion of total annual student intake at the University (%)

1983	1984	1985	1986	1987	1988	1990	1992	1994	1996	1998	2000	2002	2004
36	42	39	39	37	43	46	49	48	52	53	57	54	57

17 year old student population participating in education

Year	1999	2002	2003	2004
School leavers (age 17)	57%	55%	44%	34%
Total participation (age 17)	43%	45%	56%	66%

19 year old student population rate in higher education

Year	1999	2002	2003	2004
General (post-secondary)	5	1	3	4
Vocational (post-secondary)	7	11	10	17
Tertiary (age 19)	19	21	24	23
Total participation (age 19)	31	33	37	44
Not participating (age 19)	69	67	63	56
Population (age 19)	100	100	100	100

A report on *State Higher Education Funding* commissioned by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Employment and published in November 2004, made the following findings as regards the post secondary and tertiary education institutions:

It should be recognised that the re-evaluation of all aspects of financing post-secondary and tertiary education institutions is an international phenomenon, and is not one specific to just Malta. It is a serious long term issue.

Malta has made significant progress over recent years in stepping up participation rates in post-secondary and tertiary education. However, continued investment is required if OECD standards and the Lisbon criteria are to be reached. All post-secondary and tertiary education institutions are under severe financial pressures. In part, the pressures being faced are not the result of policy failures but of policy success. However, the success now demands the adoption of new policies.

The current systems and methodology of funding require radical revision. Broad linkage between numbers attending institutions and funding requirements leads to a model of formula funding.

Proper and effective accountability is an absolute pre-requisite for publicly funded post-secondary and tertiary education.

The revision of financing post-secondary and tertiary institutions should include consideration of all components of funding, including the current student maintenance grant and tuition fees regimes. Current trends point towards a greater degree of private contribution to the cost of higher education, while at the same time protecting the socially desirable principle of 'equal access'.

There is a need for greater strategic co-ordination and co-operation between the various institutions. Examination of the current structure of the post-secondary and tertiary institutions should accompany this strategic review.

It should be noted that post-secondary and tertiary education and training in Malta is financed practically entirely by the Government and there is very limited potential for private financial input.

The Report calls for better co-ordination between the institutions at post-secondary and higher education and training in order to exploit to the full the resources invested in them. The Report also demands more accountability and a better response to the nation's and the economy's needs. It also stresses the need of quality assurance.

Government intends to establish as soon as possible a Higher Education Commission in order to tackle these as well as other issues to strengthen the post-secondary and higher education sectors to further secure a knowledge-based society and workforce.

5. Increasing the quality and attractiveness of vocational education and training (VET)

Malta has given vocational education and training its due importance as a major cornerstone for economic development for several decades. Early in the 1960's it had already set up a Polytechnic which, within a relatively short time, had established itself as a major provider of highly qualified personnel in a number of disciplines. In the late 1970's, the Polytechnic was unfortunately absorbed within the University. In the 1960's also two Technical Institutes were opened to provide courses at craft, technician and diploma levels. At the same time, a number of post-secondary technical schools were providing courses at a lower level. In the 1970's and 1980's Trade Schools were

established at secondary education level for students who had already followed at least two years of general secondary education. It eventually transpired very clearly that these students had been suffering from inadequate general secondary education. Hence, Trade Schools were gradually phased out during the 1990's and all students were expected to follow five years of general secondary education before specialising in a trade or following a technical course of studies.

However, at the same time, Technology Education was introduced as an area of study in secondary schools. The content and methodology in the imparting of this 'subject' was carefully developed. Teachers who had been teaching in Trade Schools had to be retrained possibly to change their mind-set and be in a better position to teach Technology. Specialised workshops were set up and appropriately equipped in secondary schools. Technology, together with the introduction of Information and Communication Technology, aimed at stimulating students to follow a more specific vocational education and training course later on. This approach seems to be producing very positive results.

The opening of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST) in 2001 was the culmination of a radical and extensive reform that brought together already existing vocational education and training institutions (as already explained earlier). But MCAST provided also a common philosophy and objectives, facilities and services mutual support between the different institutes, expanded the range of the existing courses and introduced new areas of study, especially in Information and Communication Technology.

As the figures provided earlier indicate⁶, vocational education and training at post-secondary level received an unprecedented boost for the benefit of both students and the economy at large. Moreover, MCAST has significantly raised the esteem of vocational education and training, even though a much more still needs to be done to make it comparable to the academic studies followed at the University. Students are being offered financial support just like the students attending the University. They are participating on a significant scale in the Leonardo da Vinci Programme just as the University students take part in the Erasmus (Socrates) Programme. One needs to see how as many students as possible following MCAST courses could eventually continue with their academic studies at the University if the students themselves so desire although the possibility is envisaged in the Foundation Deed.

MCAST is developing an in-built flexibility to be able to respond to the emerging demands of industry that is restructuring or industry that is attracted to set up shop on the island. MCAST has already proved its capability to respond within a relatively short time to unexpected training requirements, even by providing tailor made courses as formulated with the requesting employer. MCAST provides a long list of courses and diplomas that are easily comparable with courses and diplomas provided by similar institutions in the European Union. It is establishing links with other institutions in Europe to strengthen its international perspective.

MCAST has Institutes for the following areas of study and practice: Information and Communication Technology, Agribusiness, Art and Design, Building and Construction Engineering, Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Maritime

⁶ See Section 4

Studies, Business and Commerce, and Community Services. MCAST also has its own Centre in the island of Gozo. Government has made substantial investments in MCAST which has received also funding from EU Funds in order to enlarge the main and satellite campuses and to provide all Institutes with the appropriate facilities, spaces and apparatus for a modern vocational education and training institution. It has already succeeded to increase substantially the student population in vocational education and training, an area which was lagging behind. Courses are run at five different levels, from the very basic up to degree level at level 5, a level that will be developed in the near future.

Government made a major financial investment in MCAST and it has utilised EU funding in order to further expand its facilities, to improve its teaching and learning resources, and to further enhance the qualifications and competencies of its lecturing staff, many of whom were recruited from industry as a measure to further ensure that students receive an education and training directly relevant to industry.

The Institute for Tourism Studies (as indicated elsewhere) provides the required specialised personnel for the tourism establishments, a leading industry in Malta, in various areas and at the different levels. Students can continue with their studies at the University, especially in areas of tourism management and administration.

The Institute for Conservation and Restoration Studies within the Malta Centre for Restoration has so far attracted a relatively small number of students in this specialised field, even though persons with the appropriate qualifications can easily work in Malta because of its rich cultural heritage.

The Employment and Training Corporation (ETC), the national employment agency, is responsible for the running of the apprenticeship schemes, primarily the Extended Skill Training Scheme and the Technician Apprenticeship Scheme. The actual theoretical knowledge is imparted generally at the MCAST which has all the required ancillary facilities like workshops and laboratories, while the practical experience is generally received from participating industry. The contribution from industry could be extended and be more directly relevant to the particular course which the apprentice is following.

The ETC offers a number of incentives, through various schemes, to the unemployed as well as to employers who are ready to train the unemployed, particularly to the long-term unemployed, the over 40's, the disadvantaged, persons with special needs and women returnees.

The ETC, primarily through its Training branch, provides short and longer term courses, either directly or through another institution, generally addressed to the unemployed and to those seeking employment. The ETC sometimes has to deliver courses in very basic skills. Through its guidance service the ETC tries to identify the particular needs of the individual person and provide the training s/he requires. As a result it is strengthening and extending its own guidance service to be in a better position to cope with the demand.

Although Guidance Teachers have existed in Maltese secondary schools since the late 1960's and have spread and regularly upgraded their activity ever since, it has been found necessary to further boost this extremely important service. This service is currently being studied to make its contribution as professional as possible. The aim is to provide an effective service to students while still following formal courses of study as well as to adults who need to be guided regarding their current or future career.

Government is encouraging the indispensable link between the post-secondary and higher education and training institutions and industry by appointing persons with a long experience in industry and commerce as members of the boards of these institutions. Some of these members have had a great deal of experience with the employers' associations in both industry, commerce and the services. All institutions actually meet industry as the need arises and the ETC has established an Employers' Forum in order to facilitate dialogue.

Malta has actively participated in European Union VET initiatives and, as a result, adopted a number of EU VET measures. Malta was an active participant in European Training Foundation activities and is using the services and expertise of CEDEFOP. It is participating in the Europass network. It has established the local TNet, the Technical Teachers Network in order to further improve the competencies of technical teachers, wherever they teach. European Union funding has been directed towards the implementation of initiatives in favour of vocational education and training.

6. Consolidating the European dimension of education and training

In spite of the fact that Malta lies at the southernmost point of Europe, its European identity and character is unmistakable primarily because of the values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law it has always owned, the Christian traditions and culture that it has treasured and the way of life that it has absorbed. Very close links with mainland Europe have always existed and been cultivated. Perhaps the most significant contribution towards Malta's European soul was made by the Knights of Malta who brought with them the different cultures of their origins, namely the countries they came from across Europe, and therewith enriched the Maltese scenario.

Particularly evident is the close proximity of the Maltese system of education and training with the British system of education and training as a result of the 164 years of British presence on the island. However, the older Italian traditions and culture are equally apparent. Until the 1930's Italian was an official language in Malta. Later, English, together with Maltese, became official languages, even though Maltese has always been the distinctive national language. On the other hand, the Maltese, as islanders, have always travelled quite extensively to Europe as well as to other distant continents, for business and for pleasure and for a better living.

Teaching and learning at all levels in Malta takes place in English and most textbooks are in English. Most Maltese are bilingual, using English and Maltese freely. Italian is extensively understood and widely spoken. The Maltese have always felt the need to learn foreign languages. At kindergarten and primary education levels, Maltese and English are used. At the beginning of secondary education students opt for another foreign language and at the start of their third year in secondary school they can choose yet another foreign language. The more popular languages, after English and Italian, are French, German and Spanish. Very few study Arabic, even though north Africa is not so distant from Malta.

Educational institutions at every level, from primary to university, over the years have developed links with similar institutions, particularly but definitely not exclusively, from Great Britain and Italy. Until the early 1990's Maltese students used to sit in a number of subjects for the General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level and Advanced Level examinations set by the leading British Universities. Several vocational education and training qualifications used to be and still are obtained from British Institutions, even

after following local courses of study. Again, educational institutions at every level have for several decades compared their courses and attainment targets with those set by British institutions.

Over the years, many graduates have specialised in foreign universities, particularly British and Italian. However, both during the accession period and now that Malta is a member of the European Union, studying abroad is becoming an increasingly popular part of a student's life at post-secondary and tertiary levels, particularly through the students' participation in the Leonardo da Vinci and the Socrates (Erasmus) Programmes. The European Union Programmes Unit provides the necessary promotion, management and support for the implementation of these programmes. The Leonardo da Vinci Programme is providing workers with opportunities to work for a short period abroad while the Youth Programme offers opportunities to young people to participate in activities and projects together with young people of different countries. Since 2000, about 550 University students (circa 10% of eligible students) benefited from Erasmus while over 900 young and not so young persons participated in the Leonardo da Vinci Programme. These participants received EU financial assistance as well as complementary funding from the Malta Government to facilitate their mobility.

Maltese educators have been taking part in the various initiatives of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Maltese teachers and educational administrators regularly participate in exchanges. A very encouraging number of primary and secondary schools are participating in various Comenius projects with other schools in Europe. Moreover, student exchanges which used to take place earlier are now becoming more frequent and the destinations are becoming more widespread. Exchange of views and experiences and an appreciation of one another's culture and lifestyle is an integral part of the outcomes of these exchanges. It is hoped that, once Malta is a member of the EU, the number of students following courses in EU universities will increase significantly as a result of the freedom of movement. On the other hand, many more students might be tempted to follow courses at the University of Malta since the equal treatment principle will make the financial burden much lighter.

Maltese academic and vocational qualifications as well as professional qualifications have proved to be acceptable and of a high standard for many decades. In fact, students and qualified persons have succeeded in specialising in foreign institutions without any difficulty. Over the years, the Maltese government, sometimes in collaboration with other European governments, has offered scholarships and bursaries to applicants to study abroad, especially to specialise in areas where specialisation is not available on the island. The Youth Studies Specialisation Scheme is a public-private partnership initiative intended to support financially students who wish to follow courses in areas of specialisation not available in Malta.

Now, with the Bologna Process and the Copenhagen Declaration, together with the relevant EU Directives and the related local legislation, the comparability of academic, vocational and professional qualifications is becoming better structured and more reliable while facilitating the free movement of persons and services.

In 2000, European Studies were introduced as a subject option in the third year of secondary education. These studies include elements of European history, culture, way of life, institutions as well as the European integration process. Besides, references to Europe are made during various lessons and activities in school, particularly in subjects like Social Studies, Geography and History. The teaching of the various European Union

languages must take into consideration the cultural context and lifestyle as well as the literature of the country where the language is spoken. The presence of a large number of television channels in most homes brings Europe and European affairs to the common citizens. The local radio stations and print media give a lot of importance to European news and current affairs.

More extensive as well as intensive participation in all the activities, programmes and initiatives related to education and training by the Maltese may not always be possible, even though always very desirable, as a result of the size and population of the island, especially since Malta needs to continue participating in other activities, programmes and initiatives in other international fora. One may recall that Malta has been actively participating in Council of Europe activities and initiatives since 1965 and during the last forty years it has already played an active part in the instilling of the European dimension in Malta's education and training system.