



European Construction Sector Observatory

Policy measure fact sheet

Malta

Construction Industry Skills Card (CISC)

Thematic Objectives 2 & 5

February 2018



In a nutshell

Implementing body:	Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC)
Key features & objectives:	Skills card programme for construction sector employees. It aims to promote skills training in the sector and provide participating employees with national and international recognition for their skills, to improve their employability and income, and increase customer confidence. Long-term, the scheme aims to improve quality standards, health and safety practices, and working conditions.
Implementation date:	23 May 2016
Targeted beneficiaries:	Construction workers, companies and clients; training providers.
Targeted sub-sectors:	Residential, industrial, institutional, commercial and civil engineering.
Budget (EUR):	3 million

The construction sector is one of the most important sectors of the Maltese economy and it has managed to recover from the effects of the economic crisis. Government measures aimed at supporting the industry and private sector investments have contributed to this improvement. According to the latest construction sector report published by the Central Bank of Malta, the number of business units in construction and real estate rose by 749 between 2014 and 2015, which equates to a rise of 7.8% on the previous year¹. In addition, the GDP figures released by the National Statistics Office show that the construction sector has contributed EUR 345 million in value added to the economy in 2016 and has employed 11,082 persons in the same year².

Despite the good news, the Maltese construction industry faces two major issues. Firstly, there is a skills shortage in the sector which makes it difficult for construction companies to fill skilled positions³. Secondly, demand for construction workers is high and rising, which is encouraging the appearance of irregular forms of employment and precarious working conditions. The combined effect of these two issues leads to inferior quality of work, dissatisfied customers, frustrated employees and unnecessary additional costs.

To bridge the gap between the supply of and demand for skilled employees and to tackle the lack of skills recognition and adequate training in the Maltese construction sector, the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) and the Ministry of Education were entrusted to create the Construction Industry Skills Card (CISC) scheme.

The CISC scheme is intended to be the official skills registration and recognition scheme for all construction sector employees in Malta. The scheme issues internationally recognisable skills cards that certify an employee's level of competence. The aim is to ensure that skilled employees gain recognition in the market, both nationally and internationally, and ensure that customers can have confidence in the contractors they use. The scheme's long-term goals are to improve quality standards, health and safety practices, and working conditions in the Maltese construction sector. By championing skills training and continuous professional development, the CISC scheme also aims to provide construction sector employees with a more defined career path, in particular to help incentivise younger generations to develop their professional careers in the construction industry.

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Beginning as a voluntary and free of charge scheme, CISC is expected to evolve into a fee-paying scheme after five years, which will be mandatory for all employees in the sector. Since its launch, nearly 200 construction sector employees have been issued with a skills card, according to the latest data published by BICC. Compared to the number of employees in the broad construction sector (>11,000), the CISC scheme has only managed to attract registrations from 1.7% of the workforce. The scheme has good potential and is broadly welcomed by stakeholders; however, it also clearly has a long way to go in the coming years if it is to become an industry standard and a legal requirement in Malta.

1

General description

The Construction Industry Skills Card (CISC) scheme enables construction sector employees to register and gain official recognition for their skills and competencies.

The overall objective is to ensure that construction work is only carried out by qualified individuals that adhere to quality standards and health and safety regulations.

The specific aims of the CISC are to:

- Improve the perception of the construction industry;
- Enable the industry to provide better quality products and services;
- Promote the use of new technologies;
- Help increase the supply of skilled construction workers;
- Reduce unwarranted costs;
- Improve occupational health and safety awareness;
- Reduce the environmental impact of building and construction procedures;
- Recognise and give visibility to construction worker skills, education/training (formal and informal) and qualifications.

The CISC scheme provides three categories of skills cards⁴:

- The **Skills Card** (which includes the safety card) is issued according to the four levels that are used to determine the competence of each type of trade;
- The **Professional Card** or **Safety Card** is issued for professionals that are already in possession of warrants, certified skills and experience;
- The **Visitor's Card** is issued for all visitors on construction sites, including owners and tenants.

The skills cards are colour-coded according to the level of an applicant's competence. Table 1 explains the different types of skills card and their main characteristics.

Three of the skills cards (Blue, Silver and Gold) are aimed at construction sector tradesmen that possess qualifications that are recognised by the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF)⁵. The MQF is Malta's referencing tool for describing and comparing both national and international qualifications according to a set of criteria using level descriptors applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes. Its purpose is to promote quality, transparency and mobility of qualifications in all types of education. It is mainly referenced to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), as well as to other non-European qualifications frameworks.

Table 1 also refers to a Trade Test⁶. The Maltese Government has set up a Trade Testing System to assess individuals that

have acquired knowledge, skills and competence in a particular occupation, but do not possess a formal qualification. The Trade Test is offered at three levels of occupation: operative, craftsmanship and technician. Candidates are required to pass an interview, a theory test and a practical test, and upon successful completion, they are awarded a Certificate of Competence in that particular occupation.

Table 1: Overview of Construction Industry Skills Cards

Type of Card	Characteristics
Red Skills Card for Trainees	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attend the seven-hour basic health and safety awareness course prior to visiting a construction site; • Be registered as an employee with their employer or as a student at an accredited institution; • Have received adequate onsite training in order to acquire the appropriate skills and other competences; • Card is valid for the duration of a registered course; • Not subject to renewal.
Blue Skills Card for Operatives (MQF level 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of specific onsite training; • In possession of an occupational health and safety awareness certificate; • If they do not possess the relevant qualifications that are equivalent to MQF level 2, they must undertake a Trade Test given by a certified training service provider; • Card valid for 5 years.
Silver Skills Card for Craftsmen (MQF level 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Demonstrate more than 3 years' experience in the field; • Evidence of specific onsite training; • In possession of an occupational health and safety awareness certificate; • Letter of reference from an employer, architect or engineer; • If they do not possess the relevant qualifications that are equivalent to MQF level 3, they must undertake a Trade Test given by a certified training service provider; • Card valid for 5 years.
Gold Skills Card for Technicians (MQF level 4):	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence of formal training from a recognised institution; • In possession of an occupational health and safety awareness certificate; • Card valid for 5 years.

Source: BICC, CISC White Paper⁷

Table 2 provides an overview of two additional types of cards issued by the programme. They are defined as ‘Non-Skills Cards’.

Table 2: Overview of Non-Skills Cards

Type of Card	Characteristics
Black Card for Professionals	Black Cards, which are also known as Safety Cards, are issued to construction industry professionals, such as architects and engineers, that already possess certified skills and experience, but who are not classified as tradesmen. To become a Black Card holder, the holder must first attend an occupational health and safety awareness course.
White Card for Visitors	White Cards are issued for construction site visitors, such as property owners or agents, who although not possessing any construction industry skills, still need a permit to enter a construction site. This type of card can only be issued by the site manager or the health and safety officer. White card holders must be accompanied by a registered skills card holder during the whole duration of their site visit.

Source: BICC, CISC White Paper⁸

To apply for a CISC, an applicant must complete the eForm provided on the website of the Government of Malta⁹. For the first five years, the CISC will be awarded free of charge in order to encourage construction sector workers to acquire the relevant card. After the five-year trial period, all construction sector employees will be required by law to hold a CISC and be adequately trained in occupational health and safety. The CISC application and renewal process and related training courses will then be subject to a fee that will be payable by all construction sector employees¹⁰.

The CISC application process requires applicants to provide diplomas or certificates of competence issued by a recognised training institution, such as the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) or the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST).

The BICC is responsible for skills card administration. Using smartcard technology, BICC issues skills cards that feature the holder’s photo with a hologram to prevent alterations or tampering and a barcode, which records the holder’s personal identification details and data on their skills, competences and qualifications.

2

Achieved or expected results

The Skills Card Online Directory¹¹, which is maintained by the BICC, lists all registered CISC holders up to 10 August 2017. By that date, 188 construction sector employees had been awarded a skills card.

The Gold Skills Card is currently the most popular skills card, accounting for over half of all skills cards issued. The Silver Skills Card is the second most popular skills card, followed closely by the Blue Skills Card. Approximately 1 in 6 skills cards issued are Silver Skills Cards and 1 in 7 are Blue Skills Cards. Less than 1 in 10 skills cards issued are Black Skills Cards and only 1% are Red Skills Cards. Based on the published CISC results by BICC, either no White Cards have been issued to date or they are not recorded by BICC.

Table 3: CISCs issued by card type

Card Type	Number	Share of Total
Red	2	1%
Blue	28	15%
Silver	34	18%
Gold	107	57%
Black	17	9%
Total	188	100%

Source: Skills Card Online Directory¹²

Only two Red Skills Cards have been issued since the scheme was launched. BICC's CISC register shows that one has been issued to a trainee stone mason and another to a trainee draughts person. The results recorded to date show considerably lower demand for the Red (Trainee) Skills Card, compared to the other types of skills cards. This gap in demand is perhaps reflective of some of the key challenges that the Maltese construction sector is currently facing, especially the shortage of young people entering the sector.

Table 4 lists the holders of Blue Skills Cards by their trade type. The difference between the number of holders listed in Table 3 (28) and the number of holders by trade type in Table 4 (31)

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is due to a few holders registering their competence in more than one trade. Looking at the results that have been published by BICC to date, the Blue Skills Card has proven to be most popular with assistant electricians, who account for almost one third (32%) of all Blue Skills Cards issued, followed by vehicle / heavy plant operators (23%), plasterers (16%) and assistant tilers (10%). The remaining 19% are fairly evenly spread across a further 5 trade types.

Table 4: Blue Skills Card holders by trade type

Trade Type	Number	Share of Total
Plasterer	5	16%
Assistant Electrician	10	32%
Electrician	1	3%
Lift Install & Maintenance	2	6%
Heating, Ventilation & Air Conditioning	1	3%
Welder	1	3%
Plumber	1	3%
Vehicle/ Heavy Plant Operator	7	23%
Assistant Tiler	3	10%
Total	31	100%

Source: Skills Card Online Directory¹⁴

Table 5 lists the holders of Silver Skills Cards by their trade type. The difference between the number of holders listed in Table 3 (34) and the number of holders by trade type in Table 5 (36) is due to a couple of holders registering their competence in more than one trade. Looking at the results that have been published by BICC to date, the Silver Skills Card has proven to be most popular with plumbers, who account for nearly half (42%) of all Silver Skills Cards issued, followed by vehicle/heavy plant operators (25%) and plasterers (17%). The remaining 16% are fairly evenly spread across a further 4 trade types.

Table 5: Silver Skills Card holders by trade type

Trade Type	Number	Share of Total
Electrician	2	16%
Plasterer	6	32%
Gypsum Installer	1	3%
Plumber	15	6%
Mason	2	3%
Vehicle/ Heavy Plant Operator	9	23%
Tiler	1	10%
Total	36	100%

Source: Skills Card Online Directory⁵

Table 6 lists the holders of Gold Skills Cards by their trade type. The difference between the number of holders listed in Table 3 (107) and the number of holders by trade type in Table 6 (111) is due to a few holders registering their competence in more than one trade. Looking at the results that have been published by BICC to date, the Gold Skills Card has proven to be most popular with masons, who account for over half (55%) of all Gold Skills Cards issued. The other standout result is that electricians account for nearly one third (29%) of Gold Skills Cards issued. The remaining 16% are fairly evenly spread across a further 9 trade types.

Table 7 lists the holders of Black Cards by their trade type. Looking at the results that have been published by BICC to date, the Black Card has proven to be most popular with engineers and architects, each of whom account for almost 30% of all Black Cards issued, followed by management (18%),

draughts persons (12%), quantity surveyors (6%), and health and safety officers (6%).

Table 6: Gold Skills Card holders by trade type

Trade Type	Number	Share of Total
Mason	61	55%
Health & Safety Officer	5	5%
Draughts Person	2	2%
Technician	3	3%
Electrician	32	29%
Quantity Surveyor	2	2%
Allocations Executive	1	1%
Design & Land Survey Officer	2	2%
Property & Compliance Inspector	1	1%
PV Installation	1	1%
Building Services Engineering	1	1%
Total	111	100%

Source: Skills Card Online Directory⁶

Table 7: Black Card holders by trade type

Trade Type	Number	Share of Total
Engineer	5	29%
Management	3	18%
Draughts Person	2	12%
Quantity Surveyor	1	6%
Health & Safety Officer	1	6%
Architect	5	29%
Total	17	100%

Source: Skills Card Online Directory⁷

All CISC holders listed hold certificates of competence awarded by a recognised training institution and are trade tested according to standards set by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE). The CISC scheme is expected to cover all of the 110 different trades and professions related to the broad construction industry within five years¹⁸.

3

Perspectives and lessons learned

From a **government perspective**, the Ministry for Education and Employment views the CISC scheme as an important step forward for the construction sector, because it is providing competent employees with an internationally recognised verification of their skills. It is also helping to improve the image of the sector.

The Ministry for Social Dialogue, Consumer Affairs and Civil Liberties (MEAE) views the CISC scheme as an essential vehicle that will help to promote the importance of skills training and continuous professional development in the construction sector, that will help to instil greater seriousness and discipline in the Maltese construction sector, and will ultimately help to improve service quality and customer satisfaction¹⁹.

From an **implementation perspective**, the Executive Chairman of the Building Industry Consultative Council (BICC) says that the response to the CISC scheme so far has been positive, with a significant number of employees successfully acquiring the skills card. Although the scheme is still in its infancy, it is expected to address the construction sector skills gap by ensuring that workers have the necessary skills to correctly carry out their work. In order to do that, BICC has conducted analytical work to identify the skills gaps in the Maltese construction sector. As a result, BICC is collaborating with educational institutions to provide suitable training courses to enable employees to obtain the skills card.

BICC says that one of the biggest challenges that the Maltese construction industry is facing is the loss of important skills. This is due to experienced construction professionals leaving the industry, typically at retirement age, without sufficient numbers of new and younger professionals to replace them. Fewer young people are deciding to take up a building / construction trade as a career and the general perception of the construction sector is poor²⁰. The skills initiative is expected to map out a clear path for new entrants who would like to work in the construction industry, and it is also intended to improve the industry's image and reputation. According to the Chairman of BICC, the Maltese construction industry does not just need an influx of young people to the sector, it also needs employees that are skilled in modern construction techniques. The CISC scheme provides an opportunity to address these challenges²¹.

From a **training provider's perspective**, the Director of the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)²² views the CISC scheme as an important opportunity to reduce the lack of skills in across all trade sectors. However, there are some important challenges ahead. Faced with the need to rejuvenate the construction workforce, the sector is becoming increasingly dependent on foreign workers, and it is difficult, in some cases, to assess the skills levels of non-Maltese workers. The Director of MCAST also stressed that new and improved training courses are also needed to meet the skills needs of the construction sector, in particular to provide skills training courses on modern construction techniques. Continuous training and development in all trades is needed to help employees to become more competent, and to improve their income and employability. MCAST aims to launch new specialised courses for specific trades each year, with the long-term aim of providing specialised courses for all specific trades.

From an **industry perspective**, the Malta Federation of Professional Associations (MFPA)²³ welcomes the introduction of the skills card in Malta as it is helping to validate workers with existing skills developed through formal and informal means.

The MFPA views the skills card as a positive measure that will help to increase safety and health on construction sites and the risk of accidents. However, the MFPA also voices a concern that the skills card application and renewal fee after the five-year trial period may limit its appeal. The fee may actually discourage employees from renewing their skills card and it may even create a parallel black market with services being offered at a lower price. The MFPA also believes that there is a need to better adjust the courses to the specific needs of each trade, as in some cases, the skills courses are too broad and do not add value to the needs of employees.

The Malta Developers' Association (MDA), which represents the private real estate development sector, also welcomes the CISC scheme. In response to the scheme, it has launched the MDA Academy with the aim of providing a range of courses for construction sector employees. It is now providing a health and safety (H&S) training course, in collaboration with a professional H&S consultant, to help trainees to become a CISC holder²⁴.

Endnotes

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- 5 Malta Qualifications Framework: <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx>
- 6 Trade Testing System set up by the Maltese Government: <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/training-opportunities/trade-testing-system>
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- 7 Malta Qualifications Framework, Level 2 = qualifications equal to General Education Level 2, Secondary Education Certificate Grade 6-7 or Vocational Education Level (VET) 2: <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx>
- 8 Malta Qualifications Framework, Level 3 = qualifications equal to General Education Level 2, Secondary Education Certificate Grade 1-5 or Vocational Education Level (VET) 3: <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx>
- 9 Malta Qualifications Framework, Level 4 = qualifications equal to Matriculation Certificate, Advanced Level, Intermediate Level or Vocational Education Level (VET) Diploma: <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/MQF.aspx>
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- 14 Skills Card Online Directory (BICC): <http://bicc.gov.mt/en/Pages/Skill%20Cards/Online-Directory.aspx>
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- 28 Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST): <http://www.mcast.edu.mt/>
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