



Mutual Learning Programme

DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Peer Country Comments Paper - Malta

What can Malta take from the European experience?

Peer Review on "Competence Assessment System: MyCompetence"

Sofia (Bulgaria), 28-29 November 2019



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Contact: Kim Henriksson

E-mail: EMPL-A1-UNIT@ec.europa.eu

Web site: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/mlp>

European Commission

B-1049 Brussels

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1 Introduction

This paper has been prepared for the Peer Review on "Competence Assessment System: MyCompetence" within the framework of the Mutual Learning Programme. It provides a comparative assessment of the policy example of the host country and the situation in Malta. For information on the host country policy example, please refer to the Host Country Discussion Paper¹.

2 Situation in the peer country

2.1 Skills shortages experienced

Malta has experienced steady economic growth (European Commission, 2019) in the past years, with 6.6% growth in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) registered over 2018 (National Statistics Office, 2019a). This resulted in growing employment opportunities with registered full-time employment increasing by 5.9% and part-time employment as a primary job by 1.3% during the last quarter of 2018 compared to the same month the previous year. While Malta does not have a problem with unemployment, the country is experiencing a skills mismatch. Responding to a survey in 2019 on Malta's attractiveness, 73% of companies reported difficulty in finding the personnel they needed (Ernst and Young, 2019). While this study does not identify areas where skills gaps exist, sectors which are mentioned as having difficulty to recruit include e-gaming (Malta Gaming Authority, 2018), finance, technology and other professional services (Times of Malta, 2019). The share of employers reporting labour shortages has thus increased substantially compared to 2017, when only 30 % of companies had reported labour shortages when recruiting (European Commission, 2018).

Malta has relied on foreign workers to address skills shortages. Employed foreign nationals in Malta at the end of 2018 amounted to 55,280 persons. The largest influx was from EU member states (61%), 38% were Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and a 1% from EFTA countries². This influx is not enough to satisfy labour market needs. In addition, Malta still faces high levels of early school leavers, low percentage participation in the labour market among females, older workers and disabled, all of which may be limiting Malta's prospects of economic growth (European Commission, 2019). Thus, despite the successful economic growth, the country still needs to ensure that it has an efficient mechanism for assessing existing available skills and competences as well as a means of forecasting what future skills would be required in order to address the challenge of skills mismatch.

2.2 Assessing skills and competences needs at national level

There is no specific centralised system responsible for assessing skills and competences in Malta. However, there are a number of entities which work in either education or/and employment, contributing to assessing and forecasting skills and competences in Malta. The key players within the public sector include JOBSLUS³, the public employment service in Malta, which supports the unemployed through its employment and training services, and the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE⁴), the regulator for Further and Higher Education in Malta, mainly through maintaining occupational standards, regulation of Further and Higher Education qualifications, and its research studies.

¹ Loukanova, P. (2019) Workforce Competence Assessment - in retrospect and in perspective, Host Country Discussion Paper – Bulgaria. Peer Review on "Competence Assessment System; MyCompetence", Sofia (Bulgaria), 28-29 November 2019. European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

² Information extracted from <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/resources/publication-statistics-mt-mt-en-gb/labour-market-information/foreigners-data#title1.1>

³ <https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>

⁴ <https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/Pages/default.aspx>

Cedefop's country review of Apprenticeships in Malta (Cedefop, 2015) highlighted the need to assess and forecast national skills demands. In 2016, government set up the National Skills Council (NSC) (Government of Malta, 2016) as the organisation which is responsible for setting standards for work-based learning and training programmes. It was also given the role of: advising government, developing the national skills strategy, conducting research, benchmarking and reporting performance, establishing policy and procedures, and promoting schemes, programmes and incentives for the advancement of skills in Malta (Gatt, 2020). The NSC has set a three-year strategic plan of work on three priority areas: bringing together the worlds of education and industry through work-based learning; digital skills; and research and development with the goal of creating better conditions and incentives for lifelong learners.

Currently, national documentation and initiatives with respect to skills and competences lie with different entities. Occupational standards⁵ are maintained and published by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) which support the sector skills units. NCFHE also carries out research through the Further and Higher Education Statistics report (NCFHE, Malta Enterprise & JOBSPLUS, 2016) and the EUROSTUDENT survey (NCFHE, 2014) on the social and economic conditions of student life in Malta. NCFHE also undertakes ad-hoc research in collaboration with other entities. On the other hand, JOBSPLUS publishes the occupational handbook, with the 2018 version (Jobsplus, 2018) containing information on occupations in the Maltese labour market, covering more than 90% of the labour force. JOBSPLUS also offers an online employment matching service where competences are matched to jobs available. JOBSPLUS also provides: Trade testing for a number of occupations as part of Recognition of Prior Learning; job advice; and training opportunities. In addition, there are also a number of training institutions which offer courses as part of lifelong learning at basic skills level (Directorate for Research, Lifelong Learning and Employability within the Ministry for Education and Employment), in VET (Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology –MCAST and the Institute for Tourism Studies – ITS) as well as in tertiary education (University of Malta). There are also many private training providers who contribute to learning at all levels.

3 National policies and measures

There are a number of policies and measures related to the identification of skills and competences as well as forecasting future skills needs. The key policies are in the area of employment and education are: the National Employment Policy (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d); the Framework for Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014b); the Referencing Report (NCFHE & Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016); the National Lifelong learning Strategy 2020 (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014c); and the prevention of early school leavers (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014a).

3.1 National employment and education policies

The *National Employment policy* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d), published in 2014, acknowledged changes in skills in the labour market reflecting the population's demographic changes (an ageing society) as well as a growth in the service sector, in the finance and the gaming sector. It highlights how this resulted in greater needs for highly skilled workers, yet demand for low and medium skilled workers increased too. The National Employment Policy (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d) refers to the existence of a skills mismatch back in 2014 and recognises that formal education, on the job training, experience gained throughout the years, and life-long learning, all contribute to human capital.

⁵ https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx

In view of ensuring a quality human capital, the National Employment Policy (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d) refers to various education policies which contribute to this capital. The *Framework for Education Strategy* (Government of Malta, 2014b) aligns all sectoral education strategies and policies, and sets four broad targets to which the strategy identify to include: reducing existing gaps in educational outcomes particularly among low achievers and to work to raise literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence; to support educational approaches and pedagogies that increase the educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, reducing early school-leavers; raise levels of student retention and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training; and increase the participation of learners in lifelong learning and adult learning.

The *strategy for Early School Leavers* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014d) is based on prevention, intervention, and compensation. Prevention is to be achieved through making education relevant; intervention takes place by developing early warning systems which are followed by alternative learning pathways; and compensation offers a second chance through foundation courses.

The *National lifelong learning strategy* (Ministry for Education and Employment, 2014c) focuses on adults and aims at supporting economic development, social and civic participation and individual accomplishment by encouraging greater participation in lifelong learning amongst low-skilled individuals to enhance their skills set; implementing learning methods which are flexible, accessible and relevant; enhances the skills for professional development, employment and active citizenship; developing support structures in the form of guidance and counselling for adults; and improving the governance of the lifelong learning sector.

An initiative which the National Employment Policy commits to forms part of the 'New Skills for New Jobs' Agenda which aims to identify emerging trends at sectoral level and anticipate the corresponding skills that are required. It also aims to enhance the matching process between skills and labour market requirements, bridging the gap between education and work. It acknowledges the need to monitor and react to developments in demand for skills. It has led to setting up a Skills Council, in 2016 which is composed from the social partners and industry leading experts to discuss and update the training strategy in line with latest developments. An employability index was also planned to highlight mismatches between education and the labour market, with the aim of better aligning educational content with labour market requirements as well as improve the relevance of career guidance. This employability index was published in 2015 (Employment and Training Corporation, 2015)

3.2 Analysis of the policies/measures

Since the publication of the National Employment Policy and related education policies, government has also been involved in implementation of the targets set. Initiatives reflect commitment for the 'New Skills for New Jobs' agenda.

There have been a number of achievements. The National Commission for Further and Higher Education was entrusted with continuing its support to the sector skills units to develop and update more occupational standards within the sectors. Currently, sector skills units have been set up for seven sectors which now include: Building and Construction; Health and Social Care; Automotive; Hospitality and Tourism; Hair and Beauty; Printing; and Education Support. This resulted in an increasing number of occupational standards⁶ drawn up within these sectors. These occupational standards are used by the Trade Testing Boards at JOBSPLUS, with the exception of Hospitality and Tourism at the Institute for Tourism Studies, for the validation of informal and nonformal learning.

⁶ https://ncfhe.gov.mt/en/services/Pages/All%20Services/vinfl_nos.aspx

As indicated above, the National Skills Council was set up in 2016. It has since worked on three aspects through three sub-committees. The subcommittee on work-based learning took stock of the existing relations between different education institutions and industry representatives to identify how to make work-based learning available to learners in different contexts and identifying priority actions involving multiple stakeholders, including private training providers. The sub-committee on digital skills analysed the digital skills gap in Malta, listing priority actions, and liaising with training providers to discuss implementation measures. The sub-committee for research and development focused on the skills gaps in the life sciences sector by bringing together all stakeholders to coordinate the development of a pool of professionals trained to work in the sector.

The *Referencing Report* (NCFHE & Ministry for Education and Employment, 2016) regulates the process of recognition and accreditation of education and training and any qualification or Award issued in Malta. It sets the framework for training programmes in terms of learning outcomes on knowledge skills and competences which promotes a degree of harmonisation across certification of learning in Malta.

The forecasting of skills and competences was also targeted by both NCFHE and Jobsplus. This resulted in a number of studies. NCFHE, JOBSPLUS and Malta Enterprise in 2016 implemented a National Employees skills survey to profile employees working in different sectors of the Maltese economy and to forecast the number of persons to be employed in each. In addition, JOBSPLUS published the Employability index report in 2015, and the Ministry for Education and Employment in 2016 and 2018, published the Occupational Handbook which lists the competences for many occupations in Malta.

JOBSPLUS, as the public employment service, has developed its website to support jobseekers, employers as well as researchers. The website (<https://jobsplus.gov.mt/>) offers jobseekers the opportunity to register and develop their profile based on their competences. It also provides a job search facility, career guidance as well as links to training opportunities as well as schemes for work experience. There is also a section dedicated to employers which allows them to upload engagement forms, find details about training opportunities on offer, as well as schemes that they can benefit from. There is also a third area dedicated to expert advice by researchers studying the area. It also provides a manual on how the matching programme functions. This website provides services similar to the MyCompetence (MC) tool and this is where there is potential for peer learning. Similar to the MC tool, the JOBSPLUS website provides information about occupations and training, but rather than focus on one's competences and provide an overview of these competences for different sectors, the aim is mainly to help job seekers to identify job vacancies and employers to go through the recruitment procedure and find potential recruits. In Malta, information about competences is mainly provided through the occupational standards which are the responsibility of NCFHE.

4 Assessment of success factors and transferability

The MC experience provides a good context for comparison and for peer learning experience to Malta as it reflects how countries experiencing similar challenges can learn from each other's success.

4.1 Common Aspects between Bulgaria and Malta

There are a number of aspects presented in the host paper which reflect a context similar to that experienced in Malta:

- Malta is also experiencing employment growth and decrease in unemployment. However, as in the case of Bulgaria, it is also experiencing skills mismatches;
- Malta has also subscribed to the need to identify skills and competences for different occupations in order to be able to address skills mismatch, mainly by providing direction to job seekers, education and training providers, and employers;
- Malta has also embarked, despite its rapidly changing labour market landscape, on an attempt to forecast skills supply and demand, to help young people with their career choices, workers looking for a career change, as well as employers who want to fill their job vacancies.

4.2 Challenges

However, Malta is also facing a number of challenges which are specific to its size, geography and particular economic growth in managing to provide a service similar to the MyCompetence tool.

- There are many entities involved in the provision of the information similar to that integrated in the MC. This has resulted in the fragmentation of information, and although there is a lot of information provided on the JOBSPLUS website, it is not as comprehensive as the MC: e.g. occupational standards, training opportunities outside JOBSPLUS do not form part of the site and no specific links are provided;
- The JOBSPLUS tool does not include a comprehensive competences assessment tool as in the case of MC;
- Although occupational standards exist, they are limited to a few sectors. It is also not clear to what degree they drive the design of education and training programmes in Malta.

4.3 Potential for transferability

There are aspects of the MC which can be transferred to Malta to enable it to provide a better and comprehensive system.

- Malta can learn how the co-ordinating institution manages to work with its partners and how Bulgaria ensures that it regularly feeds into the MC so that it remains dynamic and reflects current changing labour market needs;
- Learn how the online competences assessment tool works so that it can consider developing a similar model adapted to Malta's context;
- Learn how to link and integrate all available information on Qualifications, occupational standards, training providers for different sectors, career guidance, information on the labour market etc., to the existing JOBSPLUS website to provide a comprehensive service to all stakeholders: job seekers; workers looking for a career change; and employers.

5 Questions

- How does MC manage to maintain good collaboration and input from the partner entities?
- How did it develop the competences assessment tool and how does it work?
- How does it ensure that it is dynamic and reflects current labour market needs?
- Does it manage to promote industry-education links, and how does it achieve this?
- What degree of investment is needed to develop and maintain such a service?

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Annex 1 Summary table

The main points covered by the paper are summarised below.

Situation in the peer country

- Malta is experiencing sustained economic growth which has increased job opportunities and decreased unemployment.
- Malta is experiencing a degree of skills mismatch as supply and demand in competences is not balanced which has been alleviated but not removed through the influx of foreign workers.
- Malta has subscribed to the identification of competences and skills needs, but this does not cover many sectors.
- JOBSPLUS provides a job search system and other services to employers and researchers.
- However, due to the many different entities involved in qualifications, skills and competence identification and forecasting, there is a degree of fragmentation of knowledge and services provided.

Assessment of the policy measure

- The MC provides a response to similar challenges as those experienced by Malta.
- It shows how information and services can be integrated in one holistic system, something which is not currently present in Malta's services.
- MC reflects coverage of an extensive number of occupational standards which is not currently the case in Malta.
- The MC provides a competences assessment tool which is more comprehensive than the self-assessment tool in Malta.
- The MC tool manages to be dynamic and reflect current labour market needs, an aspect which Malta struggles with.

Assessment of success factors and transferability

- The MC is comprehensive and Malta can learn on how to achieve this.
- The MC coordinates the input of many entities, and this is something which Malta can learn from.
- The self-assessment competences tool is one successful aspect which would benefit Malta to learn from.
- The development and structure of the e-courses is something which can be further developed in Malta.

Questions

- How does MC manage to maintain good collaboration and input from the partner entities?
- How did it develop the competences assessment tool and how does it work?
- How does it ensure that it is dynamic and reflects current labour market needs?
- Does it manage to promote industry-education links, and how does it achieve this?
- What degree of investment is needed to develop and maintain such a service?

Annex 2 Example of relevant practice

Name of the practice:	JOBPLUS Employment service website https://jobsplus.gov.mt/
Year of implementation:	2016
Coordinating authority:	JOBPLUS
Objectives:	To enhance and facilitate access to jobs and the labour market. By offering interactive and dynamic functions, as well as a more personalised experience through the use of customisable dashboards; jobseekers and employers can enjoy an improved overall job-matching experience, which will also result in reduced recruitment costs for employers through an immediate and accurate online matching process.
Main activities:	Website which provides a service to: job seekers to list their competences, identify job vacancies, training opportunities, career guidance and work schemes available; employers to find job candidates as well as register new employees; as well as researchers looking for employment related performance in Malta. There is less emphasis on competences for the different occupations.
Results so far:	This is the tool currently used by JOBPLUS for its clients, mainly jobseekers and employers.

