

Background Paper for the Impact Assessment Study of the MQF

**Webinar on
7th April 2020**

March 2020

The National Colloquium titled “The 2nd Decade of the Malta Qualifications Framework: Reflect – Rethink – Review” was planned to be held on the April 7th, 2020. The NCFHE was looking forward to meeting all the stakeholders and MQF end users to start the discussions on the MQF Impact Assessment Study. Unfortunately, due to the spread of the COVID-19, we had no other choice but to postpone the event until further notice.

However, as we are about to launch of the MQF Impact Assessment study, we still feel the need for an official gathering to give an overview of the planned study and to make sure that we have the support and feedback of our stakeholders. As will be explained in detail below, the data collection for the impact assessment study will take place in three phases:

- 1. an online survey,**
- 2. focus groups, and**
- 3. one to one interviews.**

For this reason, on April 7th, from 9:30am until 11:30am, the NCFHE shall organise a Webinar, with presentations from the guest speakers of the National Colloquium. The Webinar will give ample opportunity for questions from participants.

The participants are invited to consider how they can help maximise the reach and the engagement rate of the online survey and the focus groups for their respective sectors. Their feedback shall be of a crucial importance to the success of the whole Impact Assessment project. Following the webinar, the feedback will contribute to make necessary amendments to the online survey which will go live by May 2020 as planned.

All participants, who originally registered for the National Colloquium, are thus invited to attend the webinar, from the safety of their homes, to share their feedback and expertise so that we ensure that the impact assessment study is relevant to all end users of the MQF.

Background to establishing MQF

The MQF was formally established in 2007. The publication of Legal Notice 347 of 2005 was the milestone of the establishment of the MQF and the introduction of the level descriptors on a national basis. The Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) was the body responsible to elaborate and guide a two-year consultation period.

Following the merge of the MQC and National Commission for Higher Education and as from 2012, the NCFHE, under the Ministry of Education and Employment, acts as the authority responsible for all aspects of the MQF implementation including its role as the EQF national coordination point (NCP) for Malta.

The last thirteen years were marked by several important developments regarding the MQF:

- Three legal notices were published on licensing, accreditation and quality assurance of further and higher education institutions and programmes, on validation of informal and non-formal learning and on strengthening the legal basis of the MQF for lifelong learning as a regulatory framework for classification of qualifications and awards;
- Secondary School Certificate and Profile (SSC&P) issued at MQF Levels 1-3;
- The first Referencing Report for Malta was launched in November 2009, creating a solid ground work for the subsequent editions, the 4th and last of which was launched in 2016.
- Two additional introductory levels have been included in the last edition of the Referencing Report but are yet to be included in the legislation of the MQF to recognise prior learning and provide an introduction to MQF Level 1;
- A study was undertaken by the NCFHE on the understanding of the MQF and EQF amongst stakeholders;
- Over 4000 Qualifications and Awards now recognised on the MQF.
- In September 2019, the NCFHE has set up an MQF Working Group to support the continuous development of the MQF.

Aims and Objectives of the MQF

The objectives of the MQF are to:

- aid transparency and understanding of qualifications at home and abroad;
- promote parity of esteem of qualifications from different learning pathways, including vocational and professional degrees and academic study programmes;
- improve overall consistency and coherence of the qualifications system.

The MQF is seen as an important tool to put lifelong learning and adult learning opportunities into practice by improving access, progression and valuing of non-formally and informally acquired competences. It provides consistency and coherence with the European Qualifications Framework and promotes the concept of mutual trust through robust quality assurance mechanisms across all levels of the MQF.

Background of the planned Impact Assessment Study

There is a lack of systematic and systemic evidence around impact particularly around the difference the MQF has made to learners, job sectors and the economy in this time. The NCFHE, therefore, needs to implement an impact assessment which will review impact of the MQF since its inception in 2007. The objectives of the Impact Assessment are to:

- Assess and analyse the impact of the MQF across a wide number of sectors/stakeholders
- Provide recommendations on possible areas of both policy and technical improvements for the MQF and its referencing to the EQF
- Provide recommendations for further implementation, promotion and regulation of the MQF
- Provide baseline indicators for future reviews

The Impact Assessment shall examine the following aspects:

- The role of the NCFHE in promoting the MQF particularly regarding end user visibility and awareness among key stakeholders
- Impact of the MQF on the quality of teaching and learning and curriculum design specifically regarding learning outcomes and level descriptors
- Impact on trust and transparency and responsiveness to the needs of the society
- Impact on international mobility of learners to and from Malta
- Impact on progression between levels and between VET and academic education pathways
- The extent to which the MQF encompasses all programmes from all types of learning pathways (VET/academic, formal/non-formal/informal, all levels, all sectors)
- The extent to which the MQF is addressing adequately learner diversity and the 21st century skills

In carrying out this project, the NCFHE is collaborating with the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership. The SCQF Partnership has an established record of regularly evaluating Scotland's NQF both overall and across specific sectors and were, therefore, selected by the NCFHE following a call for applications to carry out this important piece of work. The experience and expertise of the SCQF Partnership will ensure that all of the above objectives are being met.

Previous studies

In 2016 the NCFHE conducted a *Study on the Widespread Understanding and Appreciation of the Malta Qualifications Framework and the European Qualifications Framework*. This study examined levels of awareness of the MQF and its link to the EQF, along with methods of use and perceptions of usefulness of the MQF.

The conclusions of this study were

- The MQF needs to strike an adequate balance between its institutional and intrinsic logic to ensure that it is flexible enough to encompass all learning while ensuring that it is firmly based and reflective of the historical development of the Maltese education system.
- In order to ensure an effective and sustainable implementation, expectations towards the MQF need to be realistic and incremental and all actors responsible for its implementation have to be fully engaged and committed.
- Since the awareness and use of the MQF appear to be interlinked, the benefit and relevance of the MQF to the needs of different actors has to be ensured and made clearer. To this end, focusing on the labour market relevance of the MQF could be an important pull factor.
- In order to further increase public awareness of the MQF efforts should be focused on making it easier to understand, to use and making information about it more readily available. Solid guidance tools, regular dialogue and continuous improvement based on the feedback from users have been highlighted as important.

Proposed Methodology

Following the Cedefop's background paper published in 2017 on the measuring and evaluation of NQF impact, the NCFHE conducted a desktop research which resulted in an internal overview of impact studies from eight different countries to help inform their own requirements. The overview looked into reasons for each impact study along with the methodology used and concluded with a proposal for review of the MQF. This proposal was further developed into the terms of reference for the impact assessment study.

As the terms of reference for the proposed impact assessment are quite wide, and in order to produce clear evidence-based recommendations for future action, both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to allow for a suitable in-depth analysis.

The data collection will take place in three phases explained below:

Phase 1: Online Survey May 2020 – July 2020

Quantitative data will be collected by means of a comprehensive on-line survey tailored to each sector and promoted through partner organisations as well as via the NCFHE website and social media channels. A realistic timescale of two to three months has been set in order to gain maximum feedback. Quantitative data can easily be analysed on-line to give overall facts and figures relating to impact but can also be examined in more depth to generate key questions pertaining to certain key aspects of feedback which can then be used as a basis for the planned focus groups and interviews. It is important therefore to ask closed questions but also to allow free text for comment and opinion. For the purposes of this phase we have agreed the following groupings for respondents to make analysis easier and more consistent

Education – all sectors

Learners – all types

Parents

Employers/Sectoral organisations

Guidance Givers

Other stakeholders

Phase 2: Focus Groups July 2020 – September 2020

The next step of the review will be to hold a series of focus groups. These will focus on sectors to maximise discussion among delegates. These groups will allow for a more detailed discussion and specific questions and will be facilitated by NCFHE. Key questions and a process for recoding the discussion will be developed once the online survey has been analysed.

Phase 3: Interviews July 2020 – September 2020

Semi structured interviews with key partners are the third step of the review. This will allow for key themes or issues which have emerged from the online survey – and possibly from the focus groups – to be picked up with specific stakeholders in much more detail. NCFHE will conduct these interviews using an agreed set of questions.

Following data collection, a final report will be issued to present the assessment and analysis of the impact of the MQF across a wide number of sectors/stakeholders. It will also provide recommendations for further implementation, promotion and regulation of the MQF and suggest baseline indicators for future reviews.