



NCFHE seeks to boost transparency and coherence through the MQF

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The National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) is working on a number of fronts to increase awareness about the country's qualifications system, through the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF), and to make it more transparent.

The National Commission for Further and Higher Education acts as the authority responsible for all aspects of the MQF implementation including its role as the EQF national coordination point (NCP) for Malta, explained Madonna Maroun, MQF Coordinator and Research and Policy Manager at the Commission.

"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," she explained.

Further elaborating, she said that the entity is responsible for promoting and maintaining the MQF, which forms a fundamental element for all functions of the NCFHE: recognition, quality assurance, licensing, accreditation and validation of non-formal and informal learning.

The MQF is an instrument for the development and classification of qualifications in Malta. It has eight reference levels and two additional levels: A and B. The regulatory framework is determined by Subsidiary Legislation 327.431, which specifies the level descriptors for the eight qualification levels (Levels 1-8) and examples of qualifications that exist within the national education and training sector in Malta.

"The reference levels make it easier to understand what a learner with a qualification knows, understands and is

able to do," Ms Maroun explained. "These levels are neutral reference points to be used for all qualifications. Using level descriptors, they describe the knowledge, skills and competences that are applicable to specified levels of learning outcomes."

Furthermore, the MQF is also a referencing tool that helps to compare both national and foreign qualifications to promote quality, transparency and enable the mobility of qualifications in all types of education. It is tied to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), through a document known as the Referencing Report, and is also used in conjunction with other non-European qualifications frameworks.

"The Referencing Report is Malta's national document that references the MQF to the EQF. It provides details of the parameters that need to be adhered to by any further and higher education provider in Malta in terms of the level of learning outcomes and number of cred-

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its. This referencing process forms the basis for the recognition of national qualifications at a European level and the recognition of foreign qualifications from the European Union and beyond," the Coordinator and Policy Manager said.

The NCFHE has launched an impact assessment study on the MQF, which was established in 2007. "After more than a decade and in order to ensure that the MQF remains relevant and

adapt to changing needs of different stakeholders and end users, the NCFHE identified the need for an impact assessment study on the MQF. It also needed to study the MQF's ongoing effectiveness and sustainability in light of the continuing evolution of the education sector," Ms Maroun asserted.

This is in line with the entity's role as the National Coordination Point (NCP) for the European Qualifications Framework.



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT: MADONNA MAROUN, NCFHE MQF COORDINATOR AND RESEARCH AND POLICY MANAGER; DR ROSE ANNE CUSCHIERI, NCFHE CEO

Indeed, the NCFHE is, thus, responsible for promoting the EQF and the MQF, under the umbrella of the EQF-NCP 2018-2020 project, co-funded by the EU's Erasmus+ Programme.

"One of the project's main objectives is to conduct a first MQF impact assessment whose implementation, along with the recommendations for revisions of the MQF arising from such an impact assessment, will form the basis of a systematic MQF review mechanism that is firmly embedded in the NCFHE's functions and policies," she explained.

The impact assessment has four main objectives, she continued. Firstly, it will assess and analyse the impact of the MQF across a wide number of sectors/stakeholders. It will then help provide recommendations on possible areas of both policy and technical improvements for the MQF and its referencing to the EQF; submit recommendations for the further implementation, promotion and regulation of the MQF as well as furnish baseline indicators for future reviews.

Data collection to obtain the views of all stakeholders is taking place in three phases: an online survey, focus groups, and one to one interviews. The first phase, the online survey, was launched in May and closed at the end of June. The second and third phases are starting now, with a final report expected to be issued in December 2020. This will contain the analysis of the results and the key recommendations.

Last year, the NCFHE issued the terms of reference and a

call for applications to select an external expert to assist it in planning, designing and implementing the MQF impact assessment study, as well as to aid it develop recommendations for its improvement, and propose a systematic review mechanism.

"From all the applications received, the NCFHE selected the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership, which has an established record of regularly evaluating National Qualifications Frameworks both overall and across specific sectors and are, therefore, a key contributor to the success of the study," Ms Maroun said. "The experience and expertise of the Scottish Credit and Qualifications Framework Partnership ensured that all of the objectives set are met."

The NCFHE is also focusing on the Register of accredited institutions in Malta, which it is duty bound to maintain in accordance with Subsidiary Legislation 327.433, titled Further and Higher Education (Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance) Regulations. Featuring on the Register means that listed institutions have gone through the accreditation process and can be considered as "licensed institutions".

The Register, which is available now on the NCFHE website, is divided into two excel files, namely: the list of licensed educational institutions and the list of accredited programmes with their corresponding MQF levels. They are periodically updated, reflecting ongoing changes within the in-

stitutions and new licence-holders as well as newly-accredited programmes.

Moreover, in order to interlink the Register maintained by the NCFHE with the EUROPASS portal developed by the European Commission, the Register had to be replaced by a new, modern and efficient tool. Taking this into account, and through a project co-funded by the EU, the NCFHE is addressing this issue by developing a functional database compatible with the EU regulations.

"The development of a National Qualifications Database will contribute to making information on accredited programmes in Malta more easily available to learners both in Malta and abroad, thus ensuring that those wishing to further their education will have the right information available to make informed choices and be assured that the programme in question is accredited and MQF level rated," Ms Maroun outlined.

This will be further supported by the link of the NQD to the EC QDR, ensuring a more comprehensive database of qualifications in Europe.

"Such initiatives certainly contribute to facilitating the mobility of learners and workers within Europe by improving recognition of qualifications across borders and providing information on accredited programmes, which is comparable and compatible with that provided by other countries. This will help to ensure the transparency of the system of accreditation carried out in Malta and increase trust," Ms Maroun added.



ANNOTATIONS

- I. A FULL VET LEVEL 1 QUALIFICATION SHOULD ENJOY THE SAME PARITY OF ESTEEM AS A FULL SECONDARY SCHOOL CERTIFICATE AND PROFILE (SSC&P) LEVEL 1.
- II. A FULL VET LEVEL 2 QUALIFICATION SHOULD ENJOY THE SAME PARITY OF ESTEEM AS 4 SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE (SEC) SUBJECTS AT GRADE 6 AND 7.
- III. A VET LEVEL 3 QUALIFICATION SHOULD ENJOY THE SAME PARITY OF ESTEEM AS 6 SECONDARY EDUCATION CERTIFICATE (SEC) SUBJECTS AT GRADES 1 TO 5.
- IV. A VET DIPLOMA SHOULD ENJOY THE SAME PARITY OF ESTEEM AS THE MATRICULATION CERTIFICATE.

AS GIVEN IN SUBSIDIARY LEGISLATION 327.431, MALTA QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK FOR LIFELONG LEARNING (*WITH THE ADDITION OF INTRODUCTORY LEVELS A AND B). FIGURE: EXAMPLES/TYPES OF NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS LEVEL RATED ON THE MQF. REFERENCING REPORT, PAGES 40 - 56.

Concluding, the Coordinator and Policy Manager said that the NCFHE has also felt it is necessary to create a new logo to represent the MQF, and a national competition for its design was launched in May. By the end of June, it had received 53 submissions. "The NCFHE

deemed it important giving the MQF an independent identity so the public perceives it as a tool they can also use to plan their education pathway or even their career," she said. The winning logo will be officially launched at the beginning of August.