



# HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGY FOR MALTA

within the context of the  
Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020 (NCHE, 2009)  
and the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2015-2024



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# INTRODUCTION

This higher education strategy for Malta is embedded within the overall strategic direction of the proposed Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta for 2014 to 2024 and aims to deliver specific targets with regard to higher education. Higher Education (HE) refers to the provision of education leading to qualifications at Malta Qualifications Framework Level 5 or higher. HE includes programmes that are of a professional nature as well as those that are not targeting a specific profession.

This strategy follows up on the Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020 proposed by the former National Commission for Higher Education in 2009, but responds specifically to the need for a strategic direction and priorities for the European Union's programming period of 2014-2020.

It sets out by providing an overview of the development of the higher education sector in Malta to date in order to highlight the key concerns for its further development. To this end, the strategy has also drawn on related policies and strategies of public entities and stakeholders at national and international level influencing higher education policy. It has done so to contextualise these concerns and derive from them possible initiatives to address them.

Based on this context, the strategy proposes a list of measures to address the identified key concerns and priority areas. In order for this strategy remain relevant and flexible enough to accommodate changing circumstances, an action plan has been annexed to this strategy and further details the actors, timeline and contribution of these actions towards the measures and priority areas identified.

The strategy with its proposed measures and action plan have been subject to internal consultation and regular feedback by a steering group including representatives from the University of Malta, MCAST, ITS, ETC and the Ministry for Education and Employment. The NCFHE would like to express its sincere thanks for the generosity with which these actors shared their time and feedback in the development of this strategy. It would also like to express its gratitude for the feedback received during the public round table consultation held on the initial draft document on 16th July 2014.



## 01

## THE DEVELOPMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN MALTA

### 1.1. Increasing participation and attainment in higher education

In the past decade Malta has witnessed a considerable expansion of its higher education sector. While at the turn of the millennium 6,362 students were enrolled in higher education, this number had increased to 14,718 in 2012 (see Figure 1). This rise in participation in higher education had two very positive effects for Malta. Firstly, it resulted in an increase in higher education attainment from 9.3% of 30-34 year olds holding higher education qualifications in 2002 to 26.0% in 2013 (see Table 2). Secondly, it resulted in a decrease in early school leaving. That means the share of 18-24 year olds with at most lower secondary education, which in Malta is equivalent to the end of compulsory schooling, and who are not in education or training has decreased from 53.2% in 2002 to 20.8% in 2013 (see Table 3).

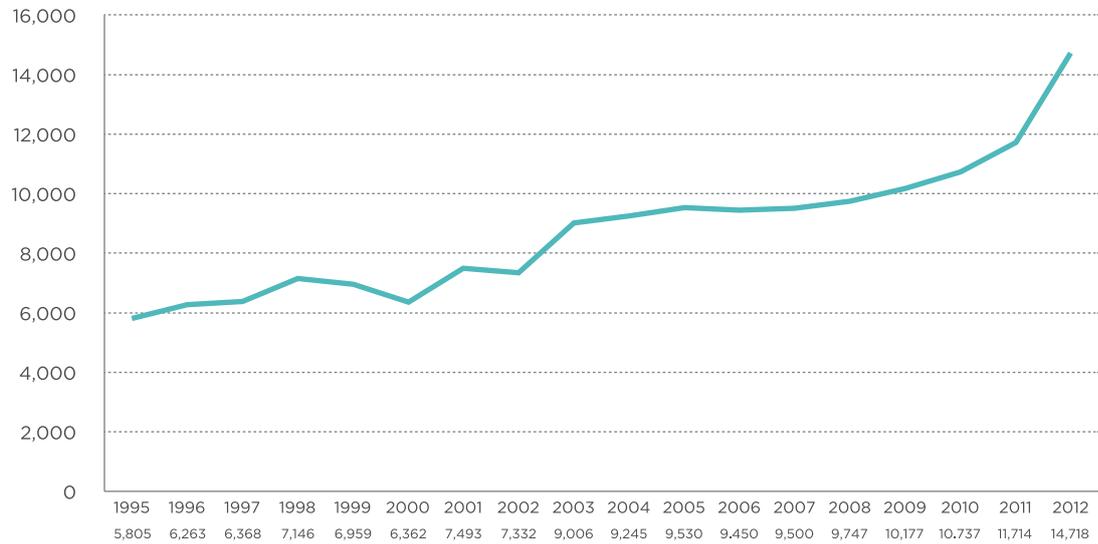
However, despite these encouraging developments, progress has been well below that registered in the 28 European Union member states. While the EU average stood at 36.8% of 30-34 year olds with higher education qualifications in 2013, the share for Malta was 26.0% (see Table 2). In the same manner, Malta's share of 20.8% of early school leavers in 2013 is far above the EU average, which stood at 12.0% (see Table 3).

Besides that, Malta has committed to align itself to the European Union's target to increase higher education attainment of 30-34 year olds to 40% and reduce the share of early school leavers among 18-24 year olds to 10% by 2020.<sup>1</sup> While the National Reform Programme for Malta has confirmed the 10% target for early school leavers, the target for higher education attainment has been set more cautiously at 33% of 30-34 year olds by 2020.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> European Commission: *Communication from the Commission. Europe 2020. A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Brussels (2010)*, Available online at: <http://ec.europa.eu/eu2020/pdf/COMPLETE%20EN%20BARROSO%20%20%20007%20-%20Europe%202020%20-%20EN%20version.pdf>, last accessed on 21st October 2014, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of Finance. *Malta's National Reform Programme under the Europe 2020 Strategy. Malta (2014)*, Available online at: <http://mfin.gov.mt/en/Library/Documents/NRP/NRP%202014%20Final%20Version.pdf>, last accessed on 24th October 2014, p. 25.

**FIGURE 1**  
Total student population enrolled  
in higher education in Malta from 1995-2013



(Source: 1994-2005 NSO Education Statistics; 2006-2007 NCHE provisional data; 2008-2013 NCFHE Further and Higher Education Statistics Survey 2008, 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012)

Students in HE

**TABLE 2**  
Share of 30-34 year olds in Malta and the EU-28  
having attained higher education from 2002-2013

GEO/TIME		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU-28	Total	23.6	25.0	26.9	28.1	29.0	30.1	31.2	32.3	33.6	34.7	35.9	36.9
	Males	22.6	24.0	25.3	26.1	26.3	27.2	28.0	28.0	30.0	30.8	31.7	32.7
	Females	24.5	26.1	28.6	30.1	31.6	32.9	34.4	35.7	37.2	38.6	40.2	41.2
MALTA	Total	9.3	13.7	17.6	17.6	20.7	20.8	21.0	21.9	20.6	23.4	24.9	26.0
	Males	10.3	14.9	19.3	17.9	19.3	19.1	21.0	20.3	17.5	22.6	23.4	22.6
	Females	8.2	12.6	16.1	17.3	22.0	22.5	20.9	23.6	23.8	24.2	26.6	29.5

Source: EUROSTAT, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_ifse\\_07&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_ifse_07&lang=en)

TABLE 3

Share of 18-24 year olds in Malta and the EU-28 with at most lower secondary education and not currently in education or training (Early School Leavers) from 2002-2013

GEO/TIME		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU-28	Total	17.0	16.4	16.0	15.7	15.3	14.9	14.7	14.2	13.9	13.4	12.7	12.0
	Males	19.1	18.5	18.3	17.7	17.4	16.9	16.6	16.1	15.8	15.3	14.4	13.6
	Females	14.9	14.3	13.7	13.7	13.2	12.8	12.6	12.3	11.9	11.5	10.9	10.2
MALTA	Total	53.2	49.9	42.1	33.0	32.2	30.2	27.2	27.1	23.8	22.7	21.1	20.8
	Males	56.5	51.7	44.3	37.4	36.1	34.8	31.1	30.9	29.9	28.8	25.2	23.2
	Females	49.7	48.0	39.8	28.3	28.1	25.3	23.2	23.0	17.4	16.3	16.8	18.4

Source: EUROSTAT, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_lfse\\_14&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_14&lang=en)

Thus, both in order to catch up with the development in other European Union member states and achieve the Europe 2020 targets for early school leaving and higher education attainment further action is needed to promote participation and attainment in higher education.

## 1.2. Reducing gender differences in higher education

In this regard particular efforts are needed to reduce the considerable gender differences with regard to early school leaving and higher education attainment (see Table 2 and 3). The share of male Early School Leavers (23.2% in 2013) not only exceeds by far the corresponding share of females (18.4% in 2013) (see Table 2), males also report lower shares of Higher Education Attainment (22.6% in 2013) compared to females (29.5% in 2013) (see Table 3). This appears to be influenced by males being more active in the labour market, given that the share of young males in Malta that are not in employment, education or training is slightly lower (9.9%) than the share of females (10.3%) (see Table 4). While this difference may appear to be marginal, due to the larger share of male early school leavers in Malta, in absolute numbers young males appear to be more present in the labour market than young females.

TABLE 4

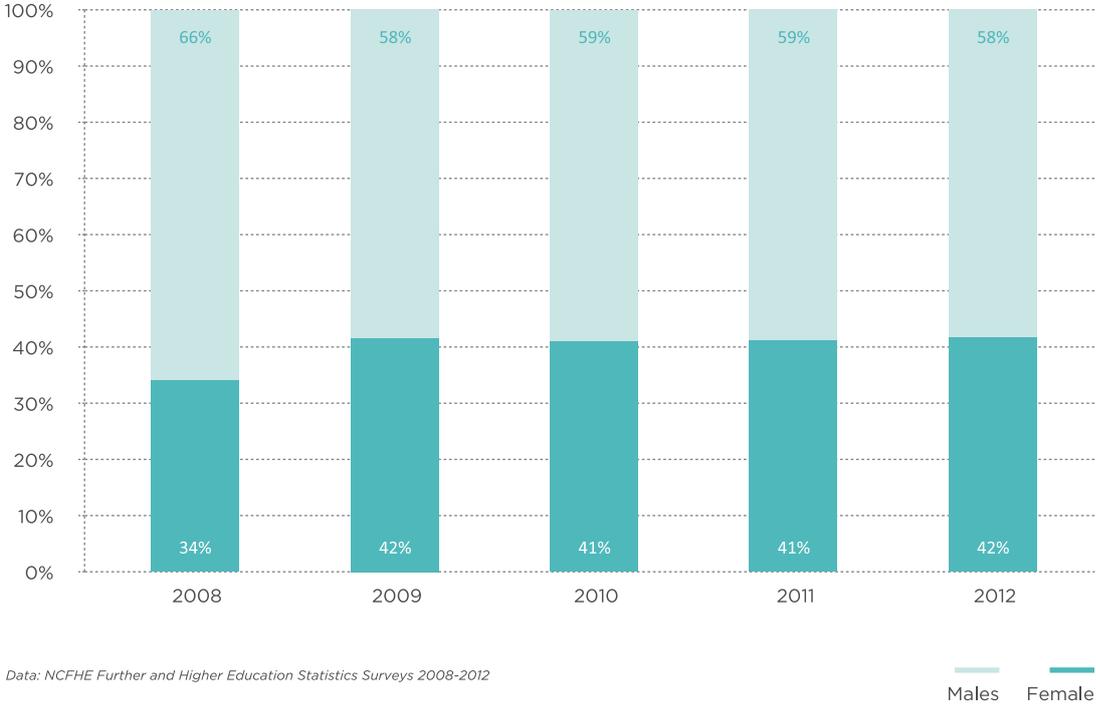
Share of 18-24 year olds in Malta and the EU-28 neither in employment nor in education and training by educational attainment level from 2002-2013

GEO ISCED97/TIME		2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
EU-28	All ISCED	16.8	16.8	16.5	16.2	15.1	14.1	13.9	16.1	16.5	16.7	17.1	17.0
	Males	14.9	15.3	15.0	14.6	13.4	12.3	12.3	15.3	15.9	16.1	16.6	16.6
	Females	18.6	18.3	18.0	17.9	16.8	15.8	15.6	16.8	17.2	17.3	17.5	17.4
MALTA	All ISCED	14.3	18.0	14.3	12.7	10.7	11.1	7.7	11.1	10.4	11.0	11.3	10.1
	Males	12.7	15.5	11.7	11.5	8.9	10.6	5.7	10.1	9.5	10.7	9.9	9.9
	Females	16.0	20.6	17.2	14.0	12.6	11.7	9.8	12.1	11.3	11.4	12.8	10.3

Source: EUROSTAT, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_lfse\\_21&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_lfse_21&lang=en)

Darmanin suggests a number of historical and cultural factors present in Maltese society that may influence this occurrence. In this regard, she reports that until the late 1970s various restrictions in the Maltese labour market applied that disadvantaged women and favoured men.<sup>3</sup> These included the obligation for women to give up employment upon marriage; the restriction that positions previously occupied by a male had to be filled again by a male; or the lack of legal restriction on wage differentials between females and males for the same job. These restrictions resulted in women overall being guided towards domestic responsibilities or to low-skilled and low-wage labour especially in manufacturing and the textile industry, in recognition of the reliance of females from low social backgrounds on own income. In contrast, boys not intending or admitted to pursue academic pathways leading to higher education were guided towards crafts and trades. It may be due to a persistent impact of these former Trade Schools that there is still a very strong male majority of students attending MCAST today, given that it is the main successor and public provider of vocational education up higher education level in Malta (MQC 2010).<sup>4</sup> Figure 5 clearly indicates that the share of females in vocationally oriented higher education programmes has remained unchanged since 2009. However, this may also be due to the fact that over the years females retreated from the low-skilled and low-wage jobs.<sup>5</sup> Along with the continued impact of the historical and cultural factors mentioned above, this may explain the persistently low female employment rate in Malta to this day.<sup>6</sup>

**FIGURE 5**  
Enrolment in vocationally oriented higher education programmes by gender 2008-2012

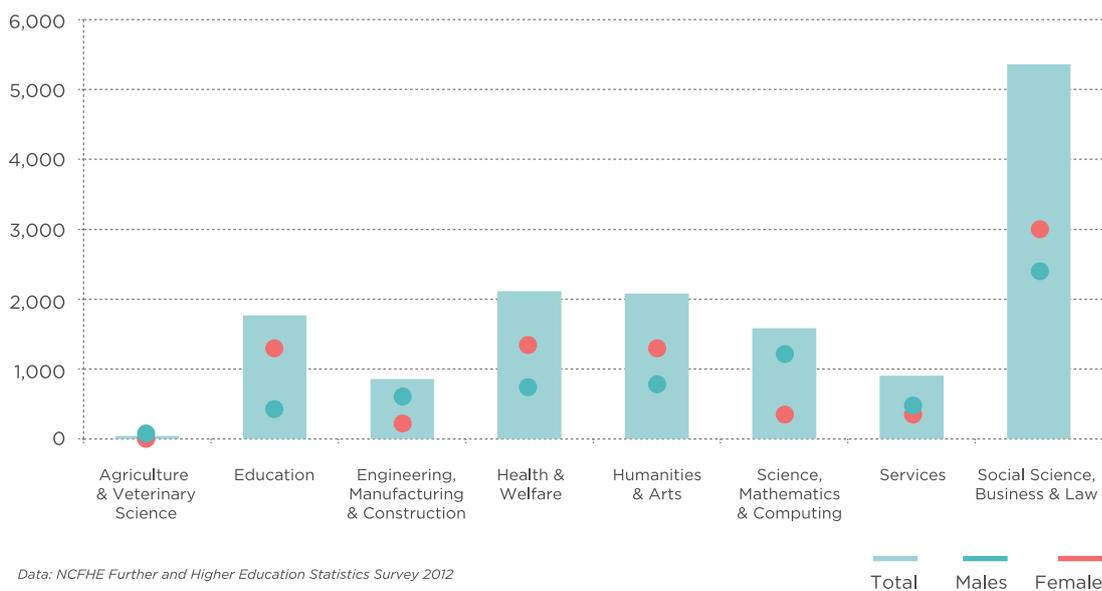


<sup>3</sup> Darmanin, Mary (1992): *The Labour Market of Schooling. Maltese girls in education and economic planning*. In: *Gender and Education*, Vol. 4, No. 1/2, 1992, p. 105-126.  
<sup>4</sup> Malta Qualifications Council (2010): *VET Policy Report. Progress in the policy priority areas for Vocational Education and Training, Malta, October 2010*.  
<sup>5</sup> Darmanin 1992  
<sup>6</sup> *ibid*

Nevertheless, Darmanin suggests that due to surges in emigration in the 1950s and resulting labour shortages, female labour was sought in sectors such as education and healthcare, apart from labour market growth in clerical professions and the retail trade targeting female workers.<sup>7</sup> Given that professions in the field of education and healthcare were accessible through higher education qualifications, this influenced female attainment at this level. In fact, Darmanin,<sup>8</sup> with reference to Borg and Falzon, has argued that the single sex school system in Malta as well as streaming have contributed to females succeeding in gaining access to and attaining higher education. This may explain why female rates of Early School Leavers are lower than males (see Table 3) and why their higher education attainment rates exceed that of males (see Table 2).

Overall, Darmanin argues that these developments have influenced female career choices to this day.<sup>9</sup> In fact, data from students enrolled in Form 2; 3 or 4 in private and public secondary schools in 1990 and 1987 respectively, thus of females or males aged 30-35 today, suggests that while students in private schools aspired in general to more prestigious and managerial positions compared to students in public secondary schools, girls were particularly attuned to the labour market opportunities available to them and, consequently, conveyed more sober aspirations than boys. This was particularly the case for females in public secondary schools. This is also evidenced in the enrolment of females and males by subject area. As Figure 6 shows most students in higher education are enrolled in programmes in the social sciences, business and law; followed by health and welfare; and humanities and arts. However, particular differences in student enrolment are notable in the field of education and science, mathematics and computing, with the difference in the number of females and males enrolled in these fields of study being particularly striking. While females are more often enrolled in study programmes in education, males are more often following studies in science, mathematics and engineering. This appears to support the argument of Darmanin.<sup>10</sup> In contrast, gender differences appear less pronounced in the field of agriculture or services, with the number of females enrolled in programmes in these two fields matching closely the number of males.

**FIGURE 6**  
Total higher education student population  
by field of study and gender in 2012



<sup>7</sup> *ibid*

<sup>8</sup> *ibid*, see also Darmanin, Mary (2003): *When Students Are Failed. 'Love' as an alternative education discourse?* In: *International Studies in Sociology of Education*, Volume 13, Number 2, 2003, p. 141-170.

<sup>9</sup> See Darmanin 1992

<sup>10</sup> *ibid*

This data suggests that action to reduce gender differences has to be twofold. On the one hand gender differences have to be addressed in terms of higher education attainment. This refers specifically to the lower share of males achieving higher education qualifications. Given the majority of males in vocationally oriented higher education (see Figure 5) its further expansion could, therefore, clearly contribute to increasing male higher education attainment. On the other hand further research is needed in order to better understand the factors influencing the apparent gender differences in the subject choices. Such research may provide a more solid basis for action on how to overcome low levels of higher education attainment among males or the differences in subject choices between males and females.

### **1.3. Increasing the participation of underrepresented groups in higher education**

Apart from widening access to higher education as a means of decreasing gender differences especially with regards to early school leaving and higher education attainment, it is also important in view of Malta's commitment to the social dimension ingrained in the Bologna Process. This refers to the aspiration that the population in higher education should reflect the diversity of Malta's entire population.<sup>11</sup>

One indicator to measure the social inclusiveness of a higher education system is to compare the share of students, whose parents have attained a particular level of education, with the corresponding share in the total population. In an inclusive higher education system that proportion would be close to 1, which would indicate that the shares are nearly equivalent in both populations.

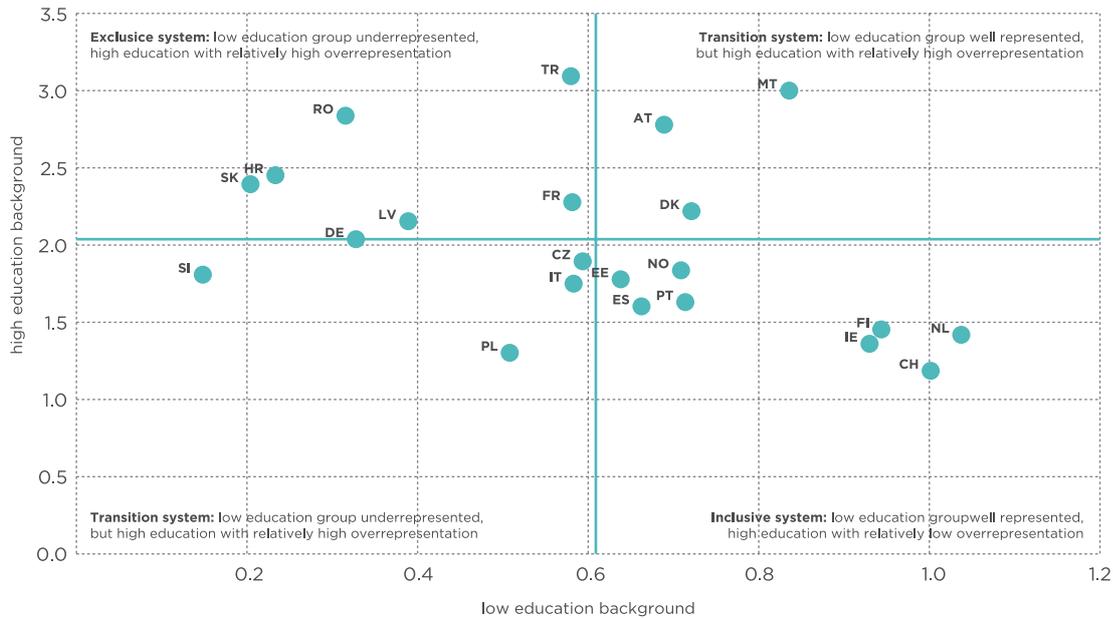
In this regard, the Eurostudent project, which compares data on the social and economic conditions of students in different countries in Europe, suggests a typology of social inclusiveness of higher education systems. For this purpose the share of students, whose fathers have attained at most compulsory education, was compared with the corresponding share in the male population aged 40-60 years (index: low education background). This was contrasted with the share of students, whose fathers have attained higher education compared to the corresponding share in the male population aged 40-60 years (index: high education background) (see Figure 7). The data indicates that in few countries the share of students from low and high education background matches well the corresponding share in the total population. Countries like Finland, Ireland, Switzerland and the Netherlands are closer to achieving an inclusive system, while the higher education system in Romania, Slovakia or Croatia appears to be considerably more exclusive. Malta's situation appears to differ somewhat with a considerable overrepresentation of individuals from high education backgrounds in higher education, but no considerable underrepresentation of individuals from low education backgrounds. This very positive finding is clearly linked to the recent expansion of Malta's higher education sector, which opened access to a wider and more diverse student population. With increasing higher education attainment in the Maltese population overrepresentation of students from higher education backgrounds will probably diminish. However, measures to attract individuals from lower education backgrounds and those, who discontinued their education after compulsory schooling, need to be expanded to ensure that their representation in higher education is not only maintained, but further increased.

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<sup>11</sup> *London Communiqué 2007*

FIGURE 7

Typology of social inclusiveness of higher education systems – highest educational attainment of students' fathers as a share of corresponding age group in general population (index: 1=perfect balance) in %



Source: Eurostudent IV, Subtopic C3 and national statistics/LFS, No data: LT, SE, E/W. No part-time students in sample: DK, LV. High education background oversampled: DK. Low education includes ISCED 3C. CZ. Males of corresponding age are defined as males between the ages of 40 and 60 years old. Update 12.01.2012, available online at: [http://www.eurostudent.eu/download\\_files/documents/1B\\_HE\\_Access\\_120112.pdf](http://www.eurostudent.eu/download_files/documents/1B_HE_Access_120112.pdf)

In this regard, Vocational Education and Training provides important alternative pathways into higher education. Data from the national Eurostudent survey in Malta carried out in 2013 shows that 34% of students enrolled in higher education programmes at MCAST or ITS have entered their programme with a VET qualification (see Figure 8). This suggests that these students have continued their education after compulsory schooling in a vocational setting and have done so up to higher education level. The expansion of vocationally oriented higher education could, therefore, clearly contribute to attracting more students overall, not just males, and in this way increase higher education attainment and reduce early school leaving in Malta. Indeed, facilitating the transition between vocational and academic oriented further and higher education programmes has also been recommended by the Rector of the University of Malta as a measure to increase higher education attainment.<sup>12</sup>

At the same time, increasing attainment levels may require higher education institutions to reach out to a more diverse student population, including mature students. However, in order to do so the underlying reasons for the low participation rate of mature students need to be addressed.<sup>13</sup> This may require more diversity in the study programmes on offer or the mode of delivery while ensuring that study programmes deliver the knowledge, skills and competences required in the labour market.

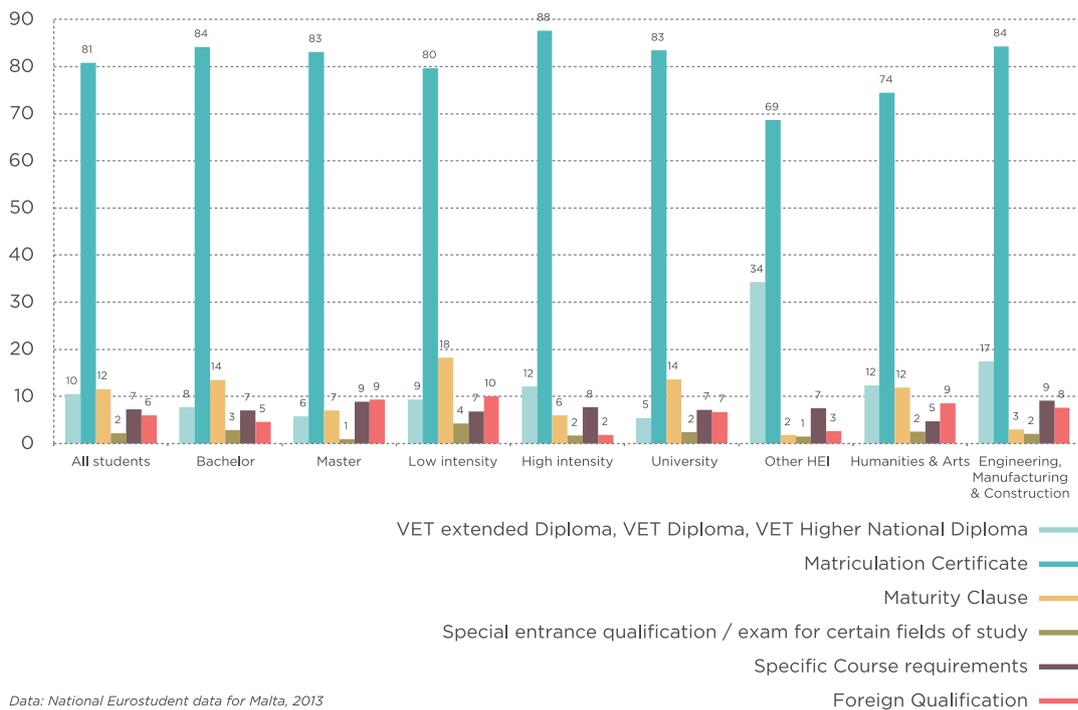
<sup>12</sup> Camilleri, Juanito (2010): *2020 Vision or Optical Illusion? Malta, 2010*.

<sup>13</sup> EACEA (2012): *The European Higher Education Area in 2012. Bologna Process Implementation Report*.

In this regard the Rector of the University of Malta<sup>14</sup> and the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>15</sup> have recommended to:

- support and encourage individuals to return to education alongside employment, including through distance learning and e-learning;
- widen the provision of higher education and attract foreign education providers to Malta to cater for a diverse student body;
- ensure that knowledge, skills and competences delivered in higher education meet the needs in the labour market and to
- monitor the supply and demand of skills in the labour market.

**FIGURE 8**  
Entry qualifications and measures used for entry into higher education by study-related characteristics of students (in %)



Data: National Eurostudent data for Malta, 2013

In order to monitor this development regular data collection on student enrolments in higher education and their social and economic conditions is important. This allows for an evaluation of the effectiveness of measures to attract underrepresented groups into higher education and for a monitoring of the obstacles they face to successfully complete higher education.

<sup>14</sup> Camilleri 2010

<sup>15</sup> The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (2014): Economic Vision for Malta 2014-2020. Full Report. Malta, 2014.

## 1.4. Increasing the relevance of higher education to the individual and the labour market

When looking into the factors that may influence young people's decision in Malta on continuing their education, it appears that the labour market opportunities available to them are an important pull-factor. In fact, while in 2013 20.6% of 18-24 year olds in Malta were considered as early school leavers<sup>16</sup> only 10.1% of this age group were neither in employment, nor in education or training.<sup>17</sup> This goes to show that young people deciding to discontinue their education after compulsory schooling are by no means inactive or unemployed. This is quite a different scenario from that found in other European countries. In fact, the average share of young people aged 18-24 that are not in employment, education or training in the 28 EU member states is 17.0%,<sup>18</sup> which exceeds the average share of early school leavers in the 28 EU member states of 12.0%.<sup>19</sup> This suggests that a considerable share of young people with qualifications above lower secondary education, thus young people not considered as early school leavers, is faced with unemployment.

Unfortunately, these employment opportunities available to young people in Malta seem to provide further incentives to compulsory school students that may be already de-motivated by schooling to discontinue their education, due to a "lack of connection with the school, perceptions that the school is boring, lack of motivation, academic challenges, personal backgrounds and community contexts."<sup>20</sup> It is evident, therefore, that the implementation of the National Curriculum Framework<sup>21</sup> and the Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta<sup>22</sup> are paramount to ensure that students are well prepared and supported to succeed both in the labour market and in Further and Higher Education. In so doing, the National Curriculum Framework and the Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta also deliver on the National Youth Policy (2015-2020) for Malta, namely

- to effectively support and encourage the young individual in fulfilling her/his potential and aspirations while addressing their needs and concerns and
- to effectively support young people as active and responsible citizens who fully participate in and contribute to the social, economic and cultural life of the nation and Europe.<sup>23</sup>

In addition to these important prevention<sup>24</sup> and intervention<sup>25</sup> strategies in compulsory education, higher education has an important role to play to provide compensation measures, such as initiatives and pathways that enable those young people, who have left school early, to return to education and training. The effective interplay between these prevention, intervention and compensation measures to tackle Early School Leaving and increase Higher Education Attainment is important also in view of the particular impact of unemployment on young people and especially young people with low levels of education, which has been further aggravated in the wake of the financial crisis since 2008 (Dietrich 2012; Bell & Blanchflower 2011; Scarpetta et. al. 2010; Verick 2009).

<sup>16</sup> See Table 3, EUROSTAT, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_ifse\\_14&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_ifse_14&lang=en)

<sup>17</sup> See Table 4, EUROSTAT, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat\\_ifse\\_21&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=edat_ifse_21&lang=en)

<sup>18</sup> *ibid*

<sup>19</sup> See Table 3

<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education and Employment (2012): *A National Curriculum Framework for All. Malta, December 2012*, p. 7.

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*

<sup>22</sup> Ministry for Education and Employment (2014): *A Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving In Malta 2014*. Malta.

<sup>23</sup> Parliamentary Secretariat for Research, Innovation, Youth and Sport (2014): *A shared vision for the future of young people. Draft National Youth Policy Framework 2015-2020. Discussion Document*. Malta, 2014, p. 16.

<sup>24</sup> Prevention refers to actions taken that avoid Early School Leaving to occur by ensuring that from the early years, schooling is meaningful and that it responds to students' needs and particular situations.

<sup>25</sup> Intervention refers to action taken to address Early School Leaving when warning systems reveal the need to give support to students at risk of becoming Early School Leavers.

That means that young people choosing to discontinue their education after compulsory schooling are encountering more difficulties in finding employment.

The impact of the financial crisis on youth unemployment is evidenced by Eurostat data for the 28 European Union member states (see Table 9). While youth unemployment decreased overall between 2004 and 2008 it continuously increased from 2009 onwards. The situation in Malta appears similar, albeit less severe. Nevertheless the rate of youth unemployment has still not reached the same level witnessed prior to the crisis in 2008. The figures also confirm that young Maltese holding at most compulsory education are particularly affected by unemployment and that the rate of unemployment among these young people appears to be increasing. Given this impact, the concerns of young people have gained in political importance at European level (European Commission 2012b; Official Journal of the European Union 2011, 2012, 2013):

The crisis which Europe has been undergoing since 2008 is having an exceptionally severe and ever-increasing impact on young people: the youth unemployment rate stood at 22.7 % in the third quarter of 2012, twice as high as the adult rate, and no signs of improvement are in sight. [...] Being unemployed at a young age can have a long-lasting negative impact, a 'scarring effect'. In addition to higher risks of future unemployment, these young people are also at a higher risk of exclusion, of poverty and of facing health problems. Effective remedies are urgently needed. (European Commission 2012b: 2)

**TABLE 9**  
Unemployment rate of 15-24 year olds by highest level of education attained (%)

GEO	ISCED11/TIME	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013
<b>EU-28</b>	All ISCED 2011 levels	18.7	18.7	17.4	15.5	15.6	19.9	21.0	21.4	22.9	23.4
	ISCED 2011 levels 0 - 2	21.4	21.8	21.3	20.1	21.3	26.2	27.5	28.3	30.5	31.0
	ISCED 2011 levels 3 - 4	18.1	17.5	15.7	13.5	13.0	17.2	18.3	18.8	20.2	20.8
	ISCED 2011 levels 5 - 8	12.9	14.3	13.6	11.5	11.7	15.6	16.4	16.8	18.0	18.8
<b>MALTA</b>	All ISCED 2011 levels	18.3	16.1	15.5	13.5	11.7	14.5	13.2	13.3	14.1	13.0
	ISCED 2011 levels 0 - 2	23.7	24.5	21.4	18.3	17.4	22.8	21.3	21.5	23.4	23.6
	ISCED 2011 levels 3 - 4		9.3	9.8	10.6	8.3	8.8	9.9	9.6	9.4	8.0
	ISCED 2011 levels 5 - 8									9.4	8.7

Data: EUROSTAT, [http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ifsa\\_urgaed&lang=en](http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/show.do?dataset=ifsa_urgaed&lang=en)

In order to avoid these 'scarring effects'<sup>26</sup> on youth or reduce their impact Scarpetta et. al. (2010) have recommended to step up assistance particularly to those youth facing difficulty in finding employment. Bell and Blanchflower (2011a; 2011b) have suggested that one strategy of young people facing unemployment or downsizing in their current job has been to return to education:

<sup>26</sup> This scarring effect of youth unemployment includes an increased likelihood of becoming unemployed again with increased number of instances of having been unemployed; the increased likelihood of facing long-term unemployment later in life; or a wage penalty specifically on young males having faced unemployment (Bell & Blanchflower 2011a; 2011b; Scarpetta et al. 2010). At the same time Verrick (2009) highlights the social and psycho-social consequences of youth unemployment, such as social exclusion, mental health problems; violence; crime or drug abuse and the associated macro-economic costs to national welfare systems. Dietrich (2012) suggests that issues of poor well-being may be linked more generally to financial concerns and not specifically to unemployment, which so far is lacking in solid evidence. They may also be the cause, rather than the effect of unemployment, suggesting the need for further research and targeted initiatives to better assist young people with mental health problems.

One symptom of this is the increase in applications for tertiary education from young people. Although students may still take part-time work and thus not drop out of the labour market completely, the reduction in the opportunity cost of study makes investment in human capital more attractive. In both the UK and the USA, college applications increased significantly during 2010. This is consistent with the evidence of Clark (forthcoming) that student enrolment rises during recessions. (Bell & Blanchflower 2011b: 8)

That means, the higher likelihood of becoming unemployed for young people with low levels of education makes returning to education more attractive. This may also explain the considerable increase in enrolments in further and higher education witnessed in Malta in the previous years.<sup>27</sup>

However, attaining higher education by itself is not a safeguard against unemployment either. Indeed, the European Commission has highlighted the impact of skills mismatches resulting in underemployment<sup>28</sup> or unfilled vacancies due to a lack of qualified individuals in a particular sector.<sup>29</sup> Likewise, Bell and Blanchflower have argued that

It is not clear that during the Great Recession increases in youth unemployment have been concentrated on the poorly educated. In the EU as a whole, rates of unemployment among those with a tertiary education qualification have risen more sharply than have those with primary or secondary qualifications, albeit from a lower base. Thus in Belgium, Italy and a number of eastern European states, unemployment rates among graduates are higher than those with a secondary qualification. One possible explanation is a genuine oversupply of graduates with relatively high reservation wages. An alternative explanation focuses on differences in labour market experience. Within the 16-24 years age group, graduates tend to have less work experience than the poorly qualified. If employers' immediate reaction to a recession is to stop hiring, then graduates may be in a more difficult position than those with lower qualifications, who already have jobs and accumulated experience.<sup>30</sup>

These considerations may influence individuals with labour market experience to return to higher education or for students to study alongside regular employment, in order to attain higher levels of qualifications while building on their work experience. In fact, the number of students enrolled in part-time programmes in further and higher education has more than doubled in previous years, from 3,349 in 2008 to 7,225 in 2012.<sup>31</sup> Another factor supporting this interpretation is the level of education pursued by students reporting more often to work regularly alongside their studies, namely programmes at MQF level 5 (45% work regularly) and MQF level 7 (67% work regularly) (see Figure 10 and Table 11). This suggests that these students may have witnessed limitations in their career progression due to the lack of a higher education qualification or seeking to advance their career prospects through the pursuit of an advanced higher education qualification.

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<sup>27</sup> Based on the NCFHE Further and Higher Education Statistics Survey 2012 enrolments in further and higher education increased from 21,621 in 2008 to 27,781 in 2012.

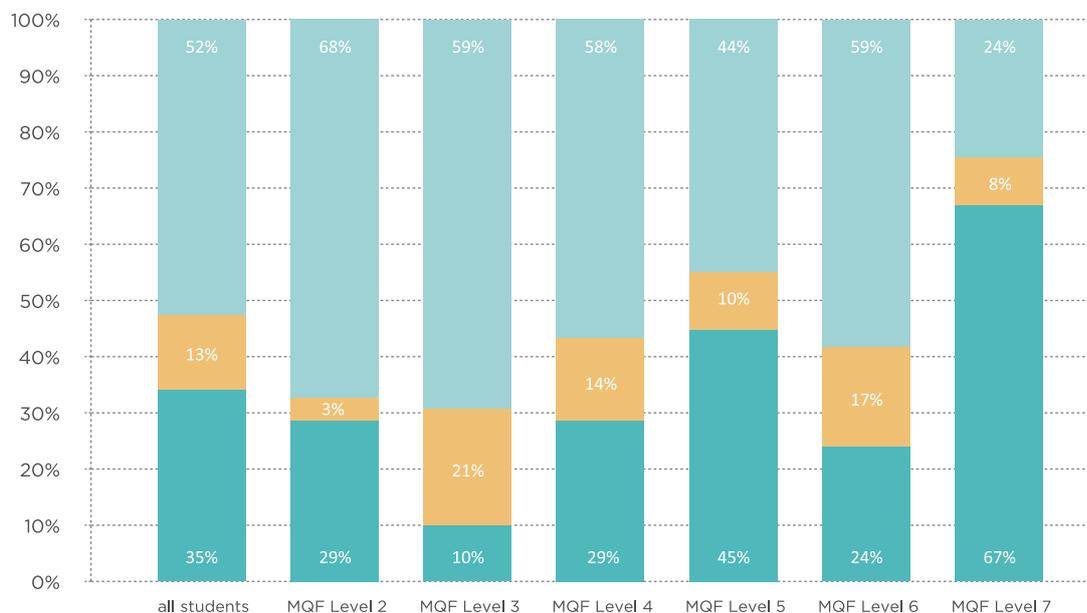
<sup>28</sup> Underemployment refers to individuals being employed in positions below the level of qualification they hold. See: COM (2012) 727 final

<sup>29</sup> See COM (2012) 727 final; COM (2012) 669 final; and 2013/C 64/06.

<sup>30</sup> Bell, David N. F./ Blanchflower, David G. (2011): *Young people and the Great Recession*. In: Discussion paper series Forschungsinstitut zur Zukunft der Arbeit, No. 5674, April 2011, p. 9.

<sup>31</sup> NCFHE Further and Higher Education Statistics Survey 2012

**FIGURE 10**  
Employment rate during the academic year 2012/2013  
by level of qualification currently enrolled in



Data: National Eurostudent data for Malta, 2013

No, I don't work during the semester — light teal  
Yes, I work during the whole semester — dark teal  
Yes, I work from time to time during the semester — orange

**TABLE 11**  
Employment rate during the academic year 2012/2013  
by level of qualification students are currently enrolled in

	all students	MQF <sup>32</sup> Level 1	MQF Level 2	MQF Level 3	MQF Level 4	MQF Level 5	MQF Level 6	MQF Level 7	MQF <sup>33</sup> Level 8
Yes, I work during the whole semester	339	n.d.	19	10	51	66	74	115	n.d.
Yes, I work from time to time during the semester	130	n.d.	2	20	24	15	54	14	n.d.
No, I don't work during the semester	503	n.d.	44	67	104	65	181	42	n.d.
<b>Total</b>	<b>972</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>179</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>310</b>	<b>171</b>	<b>1</b>

Data: National Eurostudent data for Malta, 2013

If this is the case, one may assume that students, who are working regularly alongside their studies, do so particularly often in programmes closely related to their employment. However, this is only confirmed in part by data from the national student survey in Malta on the relationship between the programme students follow and the job they hold alongside their studies (see Figure 12 and Table 13).<sup>34</sup>

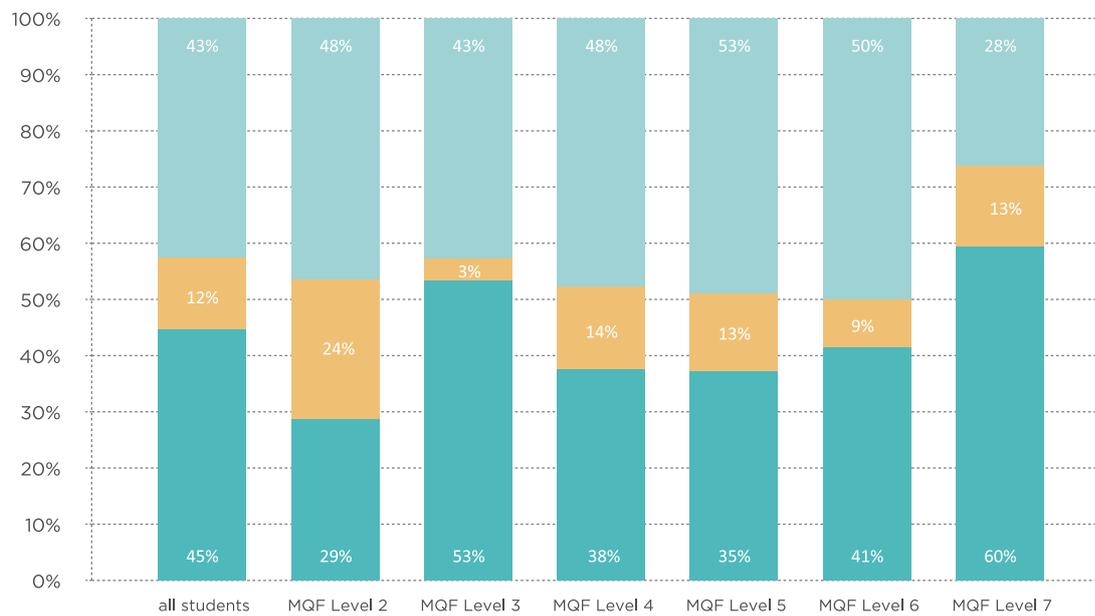
<sup>32</sup> Too few cases of students enrolled at MQF level 1 and working during the academic year 2012/2013 to report data on employment rate.

<sup>33</sup> Too few cases of students enrolled at MQF level 8 and working during the academic year 2012/2013 to report data on employment rate

<sup>34</sup> National Eurostudent data for Malta 2013

This data suggests that students enrolled in advanced higher education programmes at MQF level 7 generally hold employment that is closely related to their studies, but for students enrolled in programmes at MQF level 5 the link to their employment appears to be limited. Instead it is interesting to note that 53% of students enrolled in programmes at MQF level 3 state that their job is very closely related to their studies.

**FIGURE 12**  
Relationship between job held during the academic year 2012/2013 and the study programme by level of qualification currently enrolled in



Data: National Eurostudent data for Malta, 2013

Slightly / not at all  
Very closely  
moderately

**TABLE 13**  
Relationship between job held during the academic year 2012/2013 and the study programme by level of qualification currently enrolled in

	all students	MQF Level 1 <sup>35</sup>	MQF Level 2	MQF Level 3	MQF Level 4	MQF Level 5	MQF Level 6	MQF Level 7	MQF Level 8 <sup>36</sup>
(very) closely	207	n.d.	6	16	29	28	53	72	n.d.
Moderately	53	n.d.	5	1	11	10	11	15	n.d.
Slightly / not at all	199	n.d.	10	13	37	42	64	33	n.d.
Total	459	3	21	30	77	80	128	120	0

Data: National Eurostudent data for Malta, 2013

<sup>35</sup> Too few cases of students enrolled at MQF level 1 and working during the academic year 2012/2013 to report data on the relationship between studies and job held.

<sup>36</sup> Too few cases of students enrolled at MQF level 8 and working during the academic year 2012/2013 to report data on the relationship between studies and job held.

While employment alongside studies may have adverse effects on academic achievement (Curtis & William 2002; Metcalf 2003; Auers et. al. 2007), research suggests that it may also hold various benefits, such as the application of theoretical knowledge in the workplace or work experience to contextualise theory (Watts & Pickering 2000) in addition to increasing confidence, organisational or time-management skills (Curtis & William 2002).

It may be argued, therefore, that employment alongside studies can have considerable benefits, especially if it is related to the study programme students are following. It may provide important opportunities for individuals, who have discontinued their studies after compulsory education, to return and attain higher education, especially in instances where they face unemployment or restrictions on career progression. It may also contribute to a better matching of skills required in the labour market while continuing to expand the individual's work experience. These aspects have been particularly stressed by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>37</sup> in its Economic Vision for Malta.

In order to achieve this, programmes need to allow for an adequate balance of studies, work and family life. In this regard, the expansion of part-time programmes or programmes offered through distance learning or e-learning may be beneficial – a measure, which has also been recommended by the Rector of the University of Malta.<sup>38</sup> Moreover, the validation of knowledge, skills and competences acquired through informal and non-formal learning, including in the workplace, may be beneficial in instilling confidence and pride in individuals and motivate them to further their education or employers to invest in the training of their employees.

## **1.5. Encouraging innovative content and programme design**

Besides striving for gender equality and social inclusion in higher education; increasing attainment levels and the link between higher education and the labour market, another priority of higher education reform is to facilitate student mobility within and towards Europe. To this end Ministers responsible for higher education initiated the so-called Bologna Process in 1999 to increase the comparability and compatibility of European systems of higher education in order to facilitate the recognition of mobility periods abroad as well as of foreign qualifications within the European Higher Education Area of 47 European countries. As part of this process, which also contributes to delivering on the aims of the European Union's "Education and Training 2020 strategic framework", European countries have developed specific tools aimed at increasing the transparency, comparability and transferability of higher education qualifications across borders, such as:

- the development of a three-cycle degree structure of undergraduate; postgraduate and Doctoral degree;
- the development of system of credit transfer and accumulation through the use of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload;
- the comparability of qualifications through the issuing of the Europass Diploma Supplement;
- the development of quality assurance at programme, institutional, national and international level; and
- the development of national qualifications frameworks.

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<sup>37</sup> Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry 2014

<sup>38</sup> Camilleri 2010

This process of collaboration and implementation at national and institutional level is ongoing as a means of increasing trust in the quality of higher education provided within the European Higher Education Area. Therefore, both in order to encourage innovative content and programme design, but also to facilitate student and staff mobility from as well as to Malta, a proper implementation of the developed transparency tools and quality assurance frameworks are paramount. Indeed, within the national context the implementation of the abovementioned tools and measures is already under way:

Programme design based on units of Learning Outcomes	The design of study programmes based on units of learning outcomes is part of the national system for the accreditation of home-grown study programmes. Based on Subsidiary Legislation 327.433 on Further and Higher Education Licensing, Accreditation and Quality Assurance Regulations, licensed service providers need to adhere to the conditions made by the NCFHE, which is the authority entrusted for the licensing and accreditation of programmes of study at a national level.
Referencing of all qualifications against the Malta Qualifications Framework	Malta has established its own Qualifications Framework, which is referenced against the European Qualifications Framework for Higher Education and the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. The Malta Qualifications Framework guides programme design, programme accreditation as well as the recognition of foreign qualifications in Malta. At the same time it aides the recognition of Maltese qualifications abroad.
Implementation of ECTS based on Learning Outcomes and Student Workload	In Malta all higher education providers and programmes make use of the ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload.  Based on the recommendation by the NCFHE, 1 ECTS should be equivalent to 25 hours of total learning. In this regard the NCFHE has recommended that an estimate of 6.25 hours should be based on taught lessons, while 18.75 hours should be based on other forms of learning, such as self-study and assessment hours.
Issue of the Europass Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge in English	The University of Malta issues the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge in English to all graduates at first, second and third cycle. Moreover, MCAST issues the Diploma Supplement automatically and free of charge in English to all graduates of its first cycle programmes. However, all other public and private higher education institutions so far do not issue the Diploma Supplement.
Implementation of a quality assurance framework at institutional level	All public higher education institutions and 21 out of 39 private higher education institutions have arrangements in place for the internal approval, monitoring and periodic review of programmes and awards.
Accreditation and licensing of higher education institutions	A single national Quality Assurance Agency for the accreditation and licensing of higher education providers has been established. The NCFHE performs the role of this agency, is government funded and appointed, but has sufficient legal and operational independence to carry out its role. The NCFHE has developed the external quality mechanism that is being piloted and implemented in 2015.

However further work is needed to strengthen the implementation of these Bologna transparency tools in order to support the implementation of quality assurance in higher education in Malta currently in process. To this end more information on the implementation of the Bologna transparency tools may prove useful in contributing to the development of a robust quality assurance framework in Malta. Such a robust quality assurance framework would also support the ongoing diversification of higher education in Malta, given that the share of students following programmes of private higher education providers has increased from only 2% in 2008 to 16% in 2012,<sup>39</sup> by making transparent and promoting the quality of higher education both locally and abroad.

This would certainly serve to make Malta's higher education system more attractive for foreign students and strengthen the reputation of Maltese qualifications abroad. At the same time it would deliver on the recommendation of the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>40</sup>, which urged to widen the provision of higher education and attract foreign education providers to Malta in an effort to cater for a more diverse student population and attract foreign students to Malta.

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<sup>39</sup> NCFHE *Further and Higher Education Statistics Surveys 2008-2012*

<sup>40</sup> *The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (2014): Economic Vision for Malta 2014-2020. Full Report. Malta, 2014.*

## 02

## THE WAY FORWARD

The review of the development of higher education in Malta to date suggested that targeted initiatives are needed to increase higher education attainment and reduce early school leaving in Malta. Such initiative should focus in particular on underrepresented groups, but also more specifically on males, who are consistently outpaced by females. At the same time further efforts are needed to achieve a more balanced gender distribution in different areas of studies. However, further research appears to be needed to better understand the factors influencing study and career choices of females and males and how to best address persistent gender differences. Further research also appears to be necessary to better understand the link between higher education and the labour market, especially with regard to skills mismatches and labour market outcomes of higher education. Such information would clearly contribute to make transparent to individuals and employers the benefits of remaining in and investing in education and, thus, encouraging more individuals to attain higher education, rather than leaving school early. One important factor in ensuring the quality and relevance of higher education is the creating of a robust quality assurance system in Malta, which is already well under way. However, further information appears to be needed on the implementation of the various European transparency tools, which contribute to making higher education qualifications more comparable and compatible nationally as well as internationally.

Based on these considerations this higher education strategy, therefore, recommends the following four priority areas for action:

- increase participation and attainment;
- reduce gender differences;
- encourage innovative content and programme design; and
- increase employability and entrepreneurship.

The following section outlines measures to address the key concerns in these priority areas outlined above. These measures are further detailed in an action plan, which is annexed to this strategy in order for the flexibility of revising and adjusting actions to respond to changing circumstances. This action plan details the actors, timeline and contribution of these actions towards the measures and priority areas identified to ensure transparency and accountability for the different actions concerned.

## 1. Increase participation and attainment

In line with the above-mentioned Europe 2020 target, Malta is committed to the overarching target of increasing higher education attainment of 30-34 year olds to 33% by 2020. To further increase participation and attainment in higher education the Rector of the University of Malta<sup>41</sup> and the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>42</sup> have recommended various initiatives, such as:

- increasing the number of young people attaining the entry qualification into higher education;
- facilitating the transition between vocational and academic oriented further and higher education programmes;
- supporting and encouraging individuals to return to education alongside employment, including through distance learning and e-learning;
- widen the provision of higher education and attract foreign education providers to Malta to cater for a diverse student body and attract foreign students to Malta; and
- ensuring sustainable funding mechanisms to support higher education institutions and students.

Bearing these recommendations in mind, the following measures are being proposed.

### 1.1. Proposed measures

#### 1.1.1. Ensure strong support, sufficient and sustainable funding

In order to ensure adequate capacity and infrastructure accommodating increasing participation in higher education sufficient and sustainable funding based on the principles of access, equity and economy is required. In order to ensure such sustainable funding of higher education, further research on different funding models for higher education should be carried out in addition to a consultation of stakeholders in higher education as a basis for a funding strategy for higher education in Malta.

#### 1.1.2. Strengthen student-centred learning

To increase the relevance of education for the individual and better take into account and address different needs and experiences, the education process should centre more strongly on the learner. Such learner-centred approaches should allow for teaching and assessment methods drawing on the experiences of or catering for the needs of the individual, in addition to providing adequate career education and support.

For this reason it is recommended to implement forms of learning that draw more strongly on the use of Information and Communication Technologies as well as the development of study programmes allowing learners more flexibility and choice in the courses and workload of their study programme.

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<sup>41</sup> Camilleri, Juanito (2010): *2020 Vision or Optical Illusion?* Malta, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> *The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (2014): Economic Vision for Malta 2014-2020. Full Report.* Malta, 2014.

### **1.1.3. Strengthen career education services**

A strong focus on the individual in the education process requires adequate career education and support at all levels of education as well as outside education institutions. To this end further investment is recommended in career education services targeted both at students and their parents that is sensitive to the interests of the individual and values and promotes all learning.

### **1.1.4. Further develop the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning**

Additionally, the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning is an important vehicle to focus education more strongly on the needs and experiences of the individual. Such measures are in harmony with national measures on the Validation of Informal and Non-formal Learning. By recognizing the knowledge, skills and competences attained outside formal education settings, we do not only value competences attained in practice, but also instil self-confidence and pride in individuals and motivate them to further their competences at higher levels. At the same time, information on alternative access routes into higher education for mature students should be improved to facilitate access for those individuals interested in continuing their education at tertiary education level.

### **1.1.5. Ensure that programmes allow for an adequate balance of work, study and family life**

An important factor for individuals considering the furtherance of their learning is their compatibility with other responsibilities, such as family and work. Therefore, programmes aimed at adult learners should have a range of formats, some of which are designed with an adequate balance of work, study and family life in mind. This refers to the mode of delivery, the time at which these programmes are offered as well as the workload associated with them. Furthermore, a stronger focus on distance and e-learning may help in addressing these issues and allow more adults to further their learning.

### **1.1.6. Promote the development of e-learning as a means of widening participation in higher education**

Moreover, the provision of e-learning programmes may be helpful in increasing participation in higher education, since it allows individuals to plan and conduct their studies in a more flexible manner. Therefore, such provision should be supported and encouraged in Malta.

### **1.1.7. Increase information on available programmes and diversify the offer**

Increasing information on available programmes targeted at adult learners, as well as information on financial incentives in place to support them in this endeavour, could prove useful in increasing lifelong learning and adult learning.

### **1.1.8. Sustain regular data collection on participation, attainment and the social dimension**

In order to monitor progress achieved with regard to participation, attainment and the improvement of the social dimension of higher education, Malta will sustain a regular data collection among higher education institutions and students to inform policy development and implementation.

### **1.1.9. Improve participation of students with special needs**

The National Commission for Persons with a Disability (KNPD) has stressed the need to review the situation of students with special needs and the obstacles they face with regard to participating in higher education. In order to provide measures that adequately address the needs of these students and support them throughout higher education, Malta will undertake regular data collection on the progression routes of students with special needs into higher education, their social and economic conditions and obstacles faced throughout higher education. Besides that, entities providing assistance to individuals with special needs should endeavour to cooperate better in providing assistance and support to individuals with special needs in higher education.

### **1.1.10. Improve the permeability between different educational pathways**

Irrespective of the education pathway chosen, qualifications at the same level of the Malta Qualifications Framework, irrespective of their orientation, should allow individuals to apply and be considered for admission into programmes at the next higher level. This is in line with the proposals of the NCFHE with regard to the Malta Qualifications Framework as well as the Lisbon Recognition Convention.

## **2. Reduce gender differences**

The proposed Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta<sup>43</sup> highlights the importance of education as a means of empowering all individuals to become active citizens, find their place in society and succeed in the world of work, irrespective of their socio-economic or ethnic background, their religion, gender or sexual status. However, when it comes to higher education gender differences still persist. These are linked not only to attainment levels between females and males, but also differences in the subject areas chosen. These gender differences cause innovative potential to remain untapped. Thus, by reducing gender differences Malta may contribute to increasing inclusion in higher education as well as productivity and innovation.

### **2.1. Proposed measures**

#### **2.1.1. Research on gender differences in subject choices and higher education attainment**

In order to better understand the factors influencing the gender differences in higher education attainment and subject choices further research is needed. Such research may also provide a more solid basis for action on how to overcome low levels of higher education attainment among males or the differences in subject choices between males and females.

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<sup>43</sup> Ministry for Education and Employment (2014): *Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024. Sustaining foundations, creating alternatives, increasing employability.*

### **2.1.2. Improve career education**

Further support and information should be provided to career education professionals on the delivery and expected workload as well as the working conditions in related professions arising from different higher education programmes and in particular of STEM programmes, in order to improve the career education of interested individuals on these fields and sectors. In order to do so, career education professionals should be exposed more often to real life conditions of professionals, in particular of females, in various fields, especially in science and technology related areas. This would be helpful especially to build female role models in order to encourage a decrease in gender differences in particular in STEM subjects.

### **2.1.3. Incentivise females to take up careers in STEM-related subject matters**

In order to challenge gender role models females should be encouraged in general to enter disciplines and professions, which are not typically associated as female domains. In this regard, more work needs to be done by government to encourage the public and private labour market to ensure that working conditions and family friendly measures are in place to allow higher take up of these positions by females.

Besides that, science summer schools held in collaboration with higher education institutions and the MCST as well as females already enrolled in higher education programmes in science and technology may raise girls' aspirations to undertake studies at higher education level in these subject areas. By experiencing higher education studies in science and technology and campus life first hand and by interacting with female peers that have chosen similar pathways aspirations of females to undertake studies in STEM subjects may be raised and contribute to overcoming gender differences between subject areas in the long run.

### **2.1.4. Undertake projects and initiatives aimed increasing aspirations and participation of underrepresented groups in higher education**

In order to overcome gender differences in tertiary education attainment and support in particular educational achievement of students from low income and underrepresented groups, initiatives should be focussed on these students in order to raise their aspirations to attain higher levels of education. One such initiative could be the provision of summer schools or camps offered by higher education institutions to girls and boys still in compulsory education in order for them to get a better understanding of the day to day life on campus and increase their confidence and aspiration to achieve higher levels of education as well as provide them with the skills required to successfully complete compulsory education and attain access to further and higher education. In this regard, the engagement of student already enrolled in higher education programmes, particularly those from underrepresented groups in the implementation of the summer schools to allow students to learn with and from their peers from backgrounds similar to their own.

### **3. Encourage innovative content and programme design**

Through the Bologna Process European countries created the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) with the scope of increasing the comparability and compatibility of higher education in Europe as well as worldwide in order to increase student and staff mobility within and towards Europe. As part of this process, which contributes to delivering on the aims of the European Union's "Education and Training 2020 strategic framework", European countries have developed specific tools aimed at increasing the transparency, comparability and transferability of higher education qualifications across borders. This process of collaboration and implementation at national and institutional level is ongoing. European countries also collaborate in the field of quality assurance as a means of increasing trust in the quality of higher education provided within the European Higher Education Area.

Therefore, both in order to encourage innovative content and programme design, but also to facilitate student and staff mobility from as well as to Malta, a proper implementation of the developed transparency tools and quality assurance frameworks are paramount.

#### **3.1. Proposed measures**

##### **3.1.1. Provide information on transparency tools and measures aiding innovative content and programme design**

In order to provide educators and administrators in higher education with up to date, easily accessible information on transparency instruments aiding innovative content and programme design and support them in their implementation in line with the Bologna Process, Malta will embark on an information campaign. It is recommended that this campaign focuses on website, e-newsletters and briefing sessions on the principles of the Bologna Process and the Modernisation of Education. These measures are aimed in particular at those individuals involved in curriculum design, such as deans, faculty heads, lecturers, tutors, or individuals involved in internal quality assurance.

At the same time, this information campaign is aimed at all institutions and actors requesting information on the recognition and level of qualifications held by individuals and the measures in place providing and assuring this information, such as the inclusion of a statement of MQF equivalence in Europass Diploma Supplements.

##### **3.1.2. Monitor the implementation of the transparency tools arising from the Bologna Process**

In line with the above mentioned information campaign, the implementation of the transparency tools agreed in the Bologna Process should be monitored. This refers in particular to the design of programmes based on units of learning outcomes, the implementation of ECTS based on learning outcomes and student workload, the implementation of the Europass Diploma Supplement and its award to all graduates automatically, free of charge and in English and the implementation of robust internal quality assurance mechanisms in higher education institutions. In this regard, the development of robust internal quality assurance in higher education institutions as well as the of an external quality assurance framework will be pivotal to ensure monitoring of the implementation of these tools. Such monitoring will contribute to increasing the transparency of the content and quality of study programmes in Malta as well as abroad and, thus, contribute to the international attractiveness of higher education in Malta.

### 3.1.3. Fund innovative funding programmes and curriculum design

The implementation of the ESF 2.139 by MCAST, which aims at making higher education more attractive and accessible, is a good example for the use of European Union funding to support innovative programme and curriculum design by implementing e-learning in study programmes. In view of this positive example, European Union funding should be continued to be made available to facilitate innovative programme and curriculum design.

## 4. Increase employability and entrepreneurship

One important reason for increasing participation in higher education is to improve the living conditions and employment prospects of individuals. In addition to this objective of higher education to contribute to social inclusion, it is also an important factor for economic development and innovation capacity. However, as has also been raised by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>44</sup> this is true only insofar as higher education delivers the knowledge, skills and competences required in the labour market and there is no considerable mismatch between labour market capacity and the number of graduates in a specific area.

### 4.1. Proposed measures

#### 4.1.1. Ensure relevance of education to the labour market

In line with the recommendation by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>45</sup> greater consideration should be given in programme and curriculum development to knowledge, skills and competences required in and contributing to labour market development without neglecting the development of key competences. Such a development may not only reduce skills mismatches, but may also incentivize individuals to further their education perceiving it as relevant for their personal and professional development. This is of particular importance given the strong reliance of Malta's economy on small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular family-owned businesses. This may also discourage young individuals from choosing an early entry into the labour market at the expense of leaving school early or without a minimum level of qualification.

One way of achieving that is by setting up a Sector Skills Committee and subsequently Sector Skills Units for each specific industry in order to establish occupational standards and eventually carry out trade testing for the validation and recognition of Informal and Non-formal learning for each specific industry.

#### 4.1.2. Provide more opportunities for work placements at all levels of education

Another recommendation by the Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry<sup>46</sup> has been to make available more opportunities for students to gain work experiences related to their studies either alongside their studies and recognised by the higher education institution or as part of their studies. In this regard, funding opportunities for work placements as part of the Erasmus+ programme may provide positive incentives.

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<sup>44</sup> The Malta Chamber of Commerce, Enterprise and Industry (2014): *Economic Vision for Malta 2014-2020. Full Report. Malta, 2014.*

<sup>45</sup> *ibid*

<sup>46</sup> *ibid*

However, education institutions should ensure that students undertaking such work placements are not exploited by being given menial tasks, rather than work commensurate to the agreed set of learning outcomes between the institution and the provider of the work placement. This is already a practice by public VET providers. Nevertheless, monitoring should be further improved.

#### **4.1.3. Promote lifelong learning alongside employment**

A joint venture of industry and educational institutions is imperative to develop curricula and study programmes that respond to current and future labour market needs. Programmes should provide both subject specific knowledge, provide for personal development, but should also be relevant to the place of work. Balancing these three aspects may provide an important incentive for individuals to continue their education. This is of particular importance in fostering adult learning. Learning alongside employment may have an important role to play in this regard and to this effect the Validation of Informal and Non-formal skills attained in the work-place may be an important tool to value the achievements of employees' and incentivize employers to further invest in them.

#### **4.1.4. Undertake graduate employability research**

In order to monitor their employability regular surveys among higher education graduates and their transition into the labour market should be undertaken. The information collected in this way will be important to guide higher education institutions with regard to the relevance of their programmes to the labour market. In this way, this measure is closely linked to the above-mentioned measures 4.3.1 to 4.3.3. Besides that, this information will be of relevance to career education professionals, prospective students and their families as well as employers providing them with insights on the skills and competences held by higher education graduates and their employment prospects.

#### **4.1.5. Undertake research on skills supply and demand**

Moreover, in order to better understand skills developments regular research on skills supply and demand should be undertaken. This research will provide both data on the development of the labour market and different sectors of the economy as well as on the specific knowledge, skills and competences desired from prospective employees. This information will be important both for higher education institutions in order to ensure the relevance of their programmes to the labour market as well as for employers for the development of their businesses and recruitment. In this way, this measure is closely linked to the above-mentioned measures 4.3.1 to 4.3.3.



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