

“A strong push from within” TimesofMalta.com of Tues, July 3, 2007
Written by Dr Louis Galea, Minister of Education, Youth and Culture

The consultation process led by the Malta Qualifications Council has established a National Qualifications Framework for Malta. Together with Ireland, France and the UK, Malta has now adopted an NQF for lifelong learning. This has been confirmed in a paper by Mike Coles for the German Presidency conference on Realising A European Learning Area, held last month in Munich.

Creating a National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning is one of the government's initiatives to respond to employability. The European Qualifications Framework Recommendation, which is currently at the European Parliament, defines an NQF as "an instrument for the classification of qualifications according to a set of criteria for specific levels of learning achieved. It aims at the integration and coordination of national qualifications subsystems and the improvement of transparency, access, progression & quality of qualification in relation to labour market & civil society".

Malta is now in the forefront in adopting a classification of its qualifications in an eight-level system that embraces compulsory, vocational, higher and adult education. It is an NQF designed in such a way as to be able to include diverse forms of qualifications not as yet covered by this Framework. This includes sectoral qualifications in subjects so far marginalised on the periphery of our system of education.

Malta's NQF will also include the recognition of informal and non-formal learning experiences. Such a wide perspective is targeted towards enabling all learners to enter or re-enter formal systems of further education and training. It is also meant to improve the learner's eligibility in the labour market.

For enterprises, an NQF and, in particular, the recognition and certification of prior learning may be of importance for effective human resources management. For civil society, an NQF means a more inclusive approach in education.

The title of the three working documents Valuing All Learning that the Malta Qualifications Council prepared for discussion captures the government's policy in education and training. Every skill, every competence will be recognised in the National Qualifications Framework and will carry a currency in our labour market and in the wider European and international markets. New policies will help establish and maintain quality in all institutions and programmes of studies. Individuals will find in our educational system a stimulus to learn & progress within the Framework of qualifications.

The step towards establishing an NQF will help establish nationally-agreed qualifications level descriptors; standards for learning outcomes; new regulation for the quality of education and training provision; an easy way to relate qualifications to each other as well as a transparent credit system to promote access to learning, transfer of learning and progression in learning. Furthermore, Malta's NQF will act as a benchmark for development of new qualifications or restructuring of existing qualifications.

Malta's NQF has also managed to bring together the spirit of the Bologna (1999) and the Copenhagen (2002) processes that have established across EU member states systems such as the Europass, the European Credit Transfer System, the European Network for Quality Assurance (for higher education and for vocational education and training). This is an added value to our competitiveness as we strive to achieve excellence in our education and training sector.

Malta has now the capacity to forge its own qualifications and its own accreditation systems which will be aligned to the European Qualifications Framework.

The University of Malta is already an active player in the Bologna process. MCAST is moving towards a vocational & education system linking knowledge, skills & competence with a culture of lifelong learning & direct on-the-job experiences. Private training providers will find in the new NQF a point of reference for their development.

Malta's NQF reflects a bold push from within towards a leap of quality in our education and training culture. In the coming months, stakeholders are invited to discuss the policies proposed by the Malta Qualifications Council and to step up the process of structural reform of their learning contexts towards innovation, access and growth.