A National Curriculum Framework for All

2012

The cover illustrates the heart of the National Curriculum Framework which is the classroom set-up, in which the teacher is given the latest technology to facilitate learning in an environment that captures diversity and inclusivity and leads students to work towards personal growth, an understanding of the values of solidarity and social justice, formal qualifications and employability.

Picture taken by ©Roberto Runza

A National Curriculum Framework for All

Ministry of Education and Employment

December 2012

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK IS:

- a **reference** for action based on general consensus and the contribution of stakeholders as well as those committed to its implementation;

- a **living framework**, in such a way that allows for adjustments to new developments during implementation;

- a **policy instrument** as well as information on the implementation strategy, actions and benchmarks for implementation, monitoring and evaluation;

- a **response** to the changing demands of individuals and society, rapid changes in our education system driven by globalisation, ICT development, competition, shift of traditional values and new paradigms.

THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM FRAMEWORK AIMS AT:

1. encouraging children and young people and teachers to **work together** and learn from each other.

2. sustaining **individual attention**, so that all children fulfill their capacity.

3. supporting schools to fulfill the **expectations** of children and their parents.

4. providing **quality time** for social interaction, non-formal learning and peer activity.

5. directing education leaders to **rationalise** the content of Learning Programmes so as to ensure quality and not magnitude.

6. ensuring that, in the context of the holistic entitlement of the Learning Areas, young people in compulsory education have as an indispensible prerequisite mastery in Maltese and English, Mathematics, a Science subject and Digital Literacy.

7. helping children to regard **social justice and solidarity** as key values in the development of the Maltese society.

8. empowering parents and young people to work towards the acquisition of a **formal qualification** in key competences as the foundation for Lifelong Learning.

9. supporting education leaders to successfully implement the NCF and systematically monitor its development at **classroom level** so that national targets are achieved within established timeframes.

10. requesting teachers to regard children as Malta's future **workforce** and therefore ensure that positive attitudes towards excellence, commitment, responsibility, flexibility and entrepreneurship form part of the learning process.

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Message from
Hon Dolores Cristina
Minister of Education and Employment

The National Curriculum Framework (NCF) is the result of a long, nationwide consultation process. The initial draft, launched in May 2011, served as a platform for discussion, debate and consensus-building. It is now with great satisfaction that I present a final document which illustrates the vision and aspirations of our leaders and interested stakeholders in education in Malta.

My personal wish is that the Curriculum Framework will foster in students the desire to continue on a learning journey throughout their lives.

The legacy that this document aims to achieve is the assurance that by the end of compulsory education learners will have acquired the necessary knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values that stimulate them to view lifelong learning as part and parcel of their development as individuals and as citizens of our country, of the European Union and of the world.

The NCF 2012 looks upon education as a journey towards personal enrichment and empowerment, as a mechanism to uphold social justice and as an important tool for inclusion and employability. It draws upon the experiences of previous documents related to the national curriculum as well as on the experience of an educational system that led to the drastic reduction of early school leavers from over 54% in 2000 to 30% in 2012 and the dramatic increase of learners in higher education from less than 900 in 1987 to almost 20,000 in 2012. It has been created to contextualise learning between 2013 and 2026, to outline the milestones in the three education cycles of the Early Years, Primary and Secondary Years, to provide key indicators that schools should offer to enable learners to be qualified at the end of Compulsory education, to provide rationalised resources and infrastructure to achieve these goals and, finally, to set targets and the mechanisms to measure the extent of success and/or failure of the NCF in achieving its goals.

Through this NCF a number of ambitious but realistic targets have been set. The discussions that led to this final document have enriched our views of education and of the educational process. They have led us to take the decision to measure success and failure at the micro level of our schools on a regular basis. The strengths and the potential weaknesses of this curriculum framework will have to be regularly monitored. My clear political direction has been that in the Early Years and throughout Compulsory Education, the commitment to our children must be monitored on a regular basis to ensure that not one single child is marginalised by the system itself.

This is an NCF that is really and truly student-centred; it is flexible enough to cater for the needs and the abilities of every individual student. The aim is to give every child the opportunity to grow in an education environment which the teacher may regularly transform to fit the learner's abilities. The school will become a centre of learning where young students find the opportunity to acquire qualifications necessary for them to assume an active role in society.

This NCF addresses the gaps in our learning processes that over the years have led to absenteeism, to significant rates of early school leavers and to low skills and competences for a proportion of students. It will strengthen the already existing structures that are transforming schools into modern education centres where active and meaningful learning can take place. It will lead to an increased participation rate in post-secondary and tertiary education. It will attract more students to lifelong learning, encouraging them to embark on further and higher education streams leading to new and better formal qualifications.

The underlying philosophy is to ensure that formal, informal and non-formal learning will serve as a means to secure a commitment towards

social justice, personal growth, active citizenship and employability.

Programmes of learning will be redesigned and rewritten to rationalise content and increase quality learning time during the schooling years. We must shift our attention to what the students needs to learn and not to how much must be taught. Different pathways will be explored and set out in the full recognition of learners' multiple levels of intelligence and different learning styles.

By 2025/26 the NCF is expected to increase the percentage of students with Sixth Form qualifications from the 2011 rate of 44.5% to 60%. It is envisaged that 75% of those born in 2009 will gain a minimum of 5 SEC subjects at Grades 1 to 5. Our target is to increase by 0.5%, on an annual basis, the number of students who proceed to degree programmes in higher education.

These targets will be subject to a periodic review process to ensure that they reflect the positive experience of the NCF and the development of the Learning Outcomes Framework.

These ambitious but realistic targets imply that institutions such as the Directorates of Education, the Faculty of Education of the University of Malta, The Malta Union of Teachers, the Employment and Training Corporation, the Council for the Teaching profession, the private education sector and all training providers must respond with effective, measureable and co-ordinated policies.

Teachers inevitably play a central role in this process which should see all those in charge of education in Malta give clear directions to ensure that all children do succeed. Together with other educators and education administrators, they share the responsibility to guide students through Early and Compulsory education, to provide diverse contexts of learning, to encourage retention in lifelong learning and to bring the world of education closer to the world of work and of employment.

Citizens with formal qualifications stand a better chance of employment; they add value to our economy, our work environments and, indeed, to the general quality of life. Success in education adds to one's self-esteem and to the esteem of others.

Our positive records in youth employability, scholarship schemes, schools' infrastructure and multiple services require sustainability. The NCF aspires to build a more robust culture of commitment towards growth through education and training.

These are the key targets set by my Ministry and which the NCF will help to achieve : a reduction of early school leavers to 10% and an increased participation rate in further and higher education to over 40% by 2025.

The Ministry will be setting up a NCF Implementation Governance Board as well as the structures which will link the NCF to the MATSEC Board in order to increase the synergy between the programmes of learning in schools and the standards of the SEC examinations. This link will also ensure that what has been achieved in compulsory education will continue during the post-secondary years in preparation for further and higher education.

I shall be setting up an NCF Implementation Review Board as well as the structures which will link the NCF to the MATSEC Board in order to increase the synergy between the programmes of learning in schools and the standards of the SEC examinations. This link will also ensure that what has been achieved in compulsory education will continue during the post-secondary years in preparation for further and higher education.

I am confident that we will achieve these targets because education has always been and will remain at the heart of the Maltese society. We are what we are because of our education and training. As a small Nation, our survival, freedom, well-being and identity will largely depend on qualified future generations who hold the key to our quality of life. Our advanced social system will largely depend upon our ability today to invest heavily in the education of younger generations who will be well-equipped to work productively and continuously.

I take this opportunity to thank all the members of the Curriculum Review Committee, chaired by the Director-General of the Directorate for the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, Professor Grace Grima, and which also included the Ministry's representatives and the Consultation Strategy Group, all those who contributed to the enriching consultation process that followed and the members of NCF Post-Consultation Committee chaired by the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry, Dr James Calleja, who captured all contributions into this publication.

To all, my deepest appreciation for the hard work in producing this document which I am sure will be a constant point of reference and a landmark in the history of education in Malta.

Learning together, inspiring success

We were privileged to be asked by the Minister of Education and Employment to lead the working committees entrusted with the drafting of our National Curriculum Framework (NCF). The document which is being published by the Ministry of Education and Employment aims at providing policymakers, school leaders, teachers, employees in the education sector, academics, employers, higher education authorities and many other stakeholders with essential guidelines on the education of our young generations.

Our key guiding principle has been to develop children's and young people's knowledge, skills, competences, values and attitudes to satisfy personal, social, cultural, and economic needs. This document outlines the core components that should govern our national curriculum so that we continue to sustain personal growth and inclusivity, responsible citizenship and employability.

In addressing these three targets, we have sought to ensure that the NCF focuses on the potential of each individual child. Our educators need to continue moving away from a one-size fits all curriculum to a more learner-centred approach in which the learning process is moulded according to ones' own dispositions to learn. We are aware that this is a major challenge in our system that we need to face collectively and individually. We are convinced that the professional community entrusted with leading and implementing the curriculum will rise to the challenge so that all children will be able to develop their educational potential.

In line with our remit and terms of reference we have sought to design a national curriculum framework to provoke ideas and provide an implementation strategy that, as educators, we ought to take to lead our young generations to succeed in life. The consultation process, which lasted over twelve months, inspired this last version of the NCF, which we hope is viewed as more flexible and less prescriptive in line with what a national framework ought to be. We owe this version to all those who participated in the process of the draft version, to all those who contributed to the consultation process and also to those who rationalised the invaluable and extensive feedback received, and thereafter structured this version. This document must be read as a framework of a national curriculum and not as the curriculum *per se.*

To our mind, this framework reflects the strengths and the weaknesses that had to be addressed in compulsory education at this point in time with the hope of improved outcomes for coming generations. We have sought to contextualise the framework within wider contexts including Malta as a full member of the European Union and a player in an increasingly globalised society. The Malta Qualifications Framework and its European dimension, the successes of our National Minimum Curriculum, the solid foundations of our Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) awarded by the University of Malta and the opportunities in compulsory, further and higher education available to us as a nation also had a significant impact during our discussions of this final document.

On a wider scale, the international experiences gained by similar frameworks such as those of England, Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, New Zealand and Australia also helped us reflect on outcomes and outputs which we seek to achieve locally over the next twelve years.

The framework must be read in the context of ambitious yet achievable targets which we are setting for ourselves. Our small population gives us an advantage of size that we must exploit to the children's benefit. We are capable of providing a quality education to all our children given the priority and support given to educational services in our country. This framework encourages us to exploit this advantage to the benefit of our full range of our students including vulnerable groups and high-performing students. By adopting a flexible approach, this curriculum framework challenges the realities of our syllabi load and breadth. It also challenges teachers to regard all students as entitled to a secondary school certificate and profile that portrays meaningful learning experiences and opens the doors to further and higher education, employability and a good quality of life.

We believe that this framework entitles every young person to meaningful certification at the end of compulsory education. We also strongly believe that education planners, policy-makers and teachers in particular must ensure that every child acquires key competences that enable him or her to move up the ladder of society's economic and social opportunities. We regard Maltese, English, Mathematics, Science and Technology as key skills backed by a robust acquisition of digital literacy skills.

This document illustrates the importance of learning areas and general learning outcomes that will determine learning and assessment programmes, standards, criteria and profiles. The indication of the range of experiences in compulsory education provides students with key competences necessary for lifelong learning, employability and responsible citizenship. Children's diversity will be mirrored in pedagogical approaches that ensure attractiveness to learning by doing and learning by means of cognitive skills that support understanding, and give importance to problem solving and creative skills. This is a National Curriculum Framework for all; every child is entitled to it. We encourage teachers to regard this framework as a catalyst for innovation and change in our way of teaching and viewing children and young people.

A number of conclusions have been drawn out from the initial draft as well as from the consultation process and the rationalisation of the Post-Consultation Working Committee. The framework summarises the wide range of discussions and recommendations that have taken place throughout the whole process as well as the intensive post-consultation debate. We have captured recommendations that are based on sound national and international good practice that have strong educational value. We are aware that the framework itself may not answer all the questions that arise from the diverse needs that characterise our classrooms in the three Cycles of education. But we are confident that the curriculum framework has structures that permit teachers, as professionals, to take a leading role in designing learning and teaching processes that suit individual children.

The NCF is to be supported by a Learning Outcomes Framework. The two frameworks will form the backbone of our education programmes and will serve as national benchmarks of excellence for all schools providing parents, teachers and other stakeholders with an understanding of what children and young people know and are able to do during each of the three cycles and at the end of compulsory education. The Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) will be preparing learning programmes for each of the three Cycles which we refer to as our intended curriculum. Special attention will in turn be given to our monitoring system that could provide snapshots of the implemented and learned curriculum. Relevant forms of assessments will be put in operation in all three Cycles since assessment is seen as an integral part of the learning process. The learning and assessment processes including reporting and recording of pupil progression are given due recognition in this Curriculum Framework.

The statistical targets set at the end of compulsory schooling are not an end in themselves. On the contrary, they are to serve as success criteria and achievable goals which we can realistically work towards. We would like to inculcate a culture of quality education for all and hence regard success as being relative to one's capacity to learn. This is the main thrust of this framework – a roadmap which every child will own as a means to develop as a person and as a citizen of an increasingly diverse and challenging Maltese society.

We hope that our NCF inspires our teachers and schools to take a leading role in reviewing teaching and learning processes in our classrooms. It is within the classroom that we would like to see the real differences, with the framework acting as a guiding tool that really makes a difference to children's lives irrespective of their capacity and social and economic backgrounds.

Inclusivity, the values of social justice and responsible citizenship and employability are our desired goals. These can only be achieved through the professional commitment of all of us.

Dr James Calleja
Chairperson
Post-Consultation Working Committee

Professor Grace Grima
Chairperson
Curriculum Review Committee

Message from
the President of the Malta Union of Teachers

The last decade has been characterised by ongoing reforms in education, some of which were announced in the National Minimum Curriculum (NMC) which was published on the eve of this century. These reforms were also due to other factors such as the increased influence of the European dimension following Malta's accession to the European Union together with an increased emphasis on maximising the outcomes of the national educational system whilst acknowledging the needs of each individual learner. The review of the NMC was essential to take into consideration new realities in the educational system which include the drive towards inclusion, the use of new technologies, increased support services to aid the teaching and learning process, improved networking and decentralisation of services, specialised subject teaching in primary schools, mixed ability and differentiated teaching, abolition of streaming and junior lyceum examinations, and the drive towards comprehensive schooling.

The shift from a National Minimum Curriculum to a National Curriculum Framework (NCF) aims to increase flexibility and thus increase the relevance of the teaching process to meet the individual needs of learners. This will inevitably create new challenges on teaching grades; challenges which can only be met by ongoing investment in infrastructure, added human resources, retraining and increased support services. The NCF can only be implemented effectively once there are the necessary tools and services in place. These include the ancillary policy documents which will be produced by the Ministry of Education and Employment to aid implementation.

The NCF considers education as a continuous journey which starts at birth and is formalised during three cycles of schooling leading to higher education. It is a curriculum which aims to cater for the three educational service providers: state, church and independent schools whilst acknowledging variation in the educational provision caused by the autonomy of each sector and the ethos of each school. The MUT acknowledges the need for seamless transitions in the three cycles of education, transitions from one school to another, and transitions to higher education. This will require added uniformity which shall only be achieved through standardisation of the learning outcomes, the educational entitlement of each learning area and the benchmarking exams held during the three educational cycles.

The NCF includes clear projections of short, medium and long term goals with the objective to increase the success rate of the educational system at the National and the European levels. The inclusion of specific targets provides the necessary vision which must be communicated effectively to be shared by all stakeholders. The strategy which will be employed to meet these ends needs to take into consideration the fact that education must drive statistics and cannot instead be shaped to accommodate statistics. The ultimate aim of education is to lead an individual to reach his/her full potential and this must not be overseen.

The MUT acknowledges the improved consultation with stakeholders following the publication of the draft NCF by the Ministry of Education and Employment. The MUT engaged in a wide consultation process about the draft NCF. This ran parallel with the consultation process held by the Ministry of Education and Employment and led to the presentation of extensive feedback following the consultation process. The intake of this feedback by the NCF post consultation working group which included the direct representation of the MUT is commendable. The MUT augurs that the process will be repeated when this document is eventually translated in the implementation strategy of the NCF through the proposed Learning Outcomes Framework leading to the revision of syllabi. The MUT stresses that the expertise of educators who are presently delivering the services in schools is essential to secure ownership and to produce relevant syllabi and resources.

Educators must continue to have a central role in the implementation process of the curriculum as the success of the NCF is entirely dependant on the factual translation of this document in the classroom.

Mr Kevin Bonello

Executive Summary

This document is the conclusion of a process of discussions, consultations and designing of Malta's National Curriculum Framework (NCF). The overarching principle upon which this framework has been constructed is that of giving children and young people an appropriate entitlement of learning that enables them to accomplish their full potential as individual persons and as citizens of a small State within the European Union. Backing this principle is a set of other key principles that this NCF aims at achieving namely the development of:

- knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values that improve the quality of life of our children.

- individual capacities that help young generations to regard social justice and solidarity as pre-requisites to fairness and cohesion.

- diverse learning pathways to achievement, including vocational education and training as well as job observation experiences.

- flexibility in the management of schools and the classroom so that College Principals, Heads of Schools and educators within the classroom can be creative, innovative and provide for individual needs of learners.

- a Learning Outcomes Framework on which learning programmes will be designed leading to assessment processes in line with specific learning experiences.

- regular reviewed targets of achievement that will enable education leaders and policy makers in education to assess the impact of the NCF on the attainment of the Secondary Education Certificate at MQF Levels 2 and 3 (SEC) and the Secondary School Certificate and Profile at MQF Levels 1 and 2.

In fulfilling these principles, the NCF envisages:

- a paradigm shift away from a prescriptive curriculum towards a framework based on learning outcomes which allows for internal flexibility and attractiveness to lifelong learning.

- a move away from stand alone subjects to learning areas that form the entitlement for all learners towards inclusivity, citizenship and employability.

- diverse pathways to learning so that all learners will have opportunities to fulfil their potential within a lifelong learning context.

- the continuous development of all practitioners and ongoing support to enable them to interpret the framework and adapt it to meet the needs of their learners; and to emerging national needs and developments.

- all stakeholders in the State, Church and Independent sectors assuming a leadership role and successfully implement this framework.

This NCF promotes:
- a clear focus on improving the quality of education and raising student achievement levels.

- a readiness to depart from traditional curriculum structures and practices that may restrict learning.

- flexible learning programmes providing diverse and integrated learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners and which suit the interests and capabilities of individual learners within nationally accepted parameters.
- learning programmes that focus on understanding and emphasise the learning process and the active co-construction of meaning rather than the mere acquisition of content.

- learning programmes that empower teachers to implement innovative teaching / learning strategies especially through the use of eLearning.

- a move away from an exclusively subject-based approach that favours fragmentation and compartmentalisation of knowledge to a more cross-curricular, thematic, interdisciplinary and collaborative approach that reflects real life situations and encourages transfer of skills from one learning area to another.

- assessment that values and assesses both the processes and the products of learning.

- initial teacher education and further opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity.

- professional development that is congruent with the availability of opportunities within the extended reality of the EU.

- the development of the school as a learning community of reflective practitioners.

The NCF is presented in Part Two of this document. The main trust of the NCF is to enable teachers to respond to children's interests, arouse their curiosity and instill an inquiry-based approach to learning (the Early Years); and thereafter support and facilitate their journey of discovering the joys of learning and holistic development (the Junior Years) in preparation for certification and qualifications (the Secondary School Years) that are necessary in order to gain access to further and higher education and employment.

Personal growth and inclusivity, the values of social justice and responsible citizenship, and employability are three major anchor points of this framework. Particular attention has been given to learners' entitlement as well as the provision of different pathways to learning. The key purpose of this approach is that the NCF is a framework of learning possibilities for all and of pedagogies that address primarily the needs of the individual.

The consultation process has clearly indicated that the quality of the teaching and learning experiences must be given more importance than the content of what is being taught. Digital literacy tools need to be exploited more actively in learning and teaching processes. Current structures and support services that impact positively on the educational experiences of children and young people are to be sustained and strengthened.

The ultimate goal of the NCF is to enable individuals to become lifelong learners. This implies an effort by all to give learners the knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values necessary to be attracted to further and higher education, to re-skilling and up-skilling during the working years and to active participation in the civic and social life of our country.

The following statements capture the conclusions that the Post-Consultation Working Group has reached on the NCF which will be implemented between 2013 and 2026. The conclusions reflect the working of the Curriculum Review Committee and the feedback received during the consultation process.

1 The Working Group affirms that this document presents a **National Curriculum Framework** on which the Learning Outcomes Framework as well as the Learning and Assessment Programmes at all levels of pre-school and compulsory education should be based.

2 The Working Group re-affirms the **principles of education** presented in the draft NCF relating to *Entitlement; Diversity; Continuum of Achievement; Learner Centred Learning; Quality Assurance*; and *Teacher Professional Support.*

3 The Working Group re-affirms the **aims of education** as (i) Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners; (ii) Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work; and (iii) Learners who are responsibly engaged citizens who are able to strive for social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities.

4 The Working Group establishes the **Learning Areas** for the Junior and Secondary School Cycles of education to be *Languages; Mathematics; Science and Technology; Health and Physical Education; Religious and Ethics Education; Humanities, Education for Democracy*; and *Visual and Performing Arts.*

5 The Working Group establishes the **Cross Curricular Themes** for the Junior and Secondary school Cycles of education to be *Literacy, Digital Literacy; Learning to Learn and Co-operative Learning; Education for Sustainable Development; Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation* and *Education for Diversity.*

6 The Working Group underlines that **educators** are to use the NCF to develop a learner's capacity to nurture values and learn key skills and competences that they require to establish their long-term quality of life as persons and as citizens – and in doing so educators are to regard learners as individuals with diverse capacities that must be supported to develop into lifelong learners equipped with employability-related attitudes and skills. The Directorates[1] will work with the Faculty of Education at the

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1   'Directorates' always refers to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and the Directorate for Educational Services.

University of Malta, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST, Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), and the Council for the Teaching Profession to ensure the adequate continuous professional development of all educators.

7   The Working Group establishes the following **three education Cycles** which whilst being distinct allow for the reinforcement of knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values with regard to the transition from one Cycle to another:

Early Years Cycle	KGI KGII Y1 Y2		
Junior Years Cycle		Y3 Y4 Y5 Y6	
Secondary Years Cycle			Y7 Y8 Y9 Y10 Y11.

8   The Working Group establishes that the programmes of learning and the standards of assessment and examinations are to be based on the general learning outcomes of the NCF and the subsequent **Learning Outcomes Framework**. Assessment in pre-school and school settings makes an essential contribution to learning and progress at all levels. It is to be seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching process, providing students, educators, and parents with continuous, timely and qualitative feedback about children's progress, giving teachers tools to reflect on their practice, and providing schools and colleges with information about their curriculum planning, learning and teaching, and achievements. **Examinations and assessments** set at a Secondary Education Certificate level are to reflect the rationale of the NCF and the Learning Outcomes Framework which will be based on a pedagogy that is student-centred, inquiry-based, integrated with the cross-curricular themes, and supported by an e-Learning based approach.

9   The Working Group establishes that the NCF responds to the descriptors of the first three levels of the **Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning** which in turn is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. A Learning Outcomes Framework will be developed for the three Cycles of education as addressed by this NCF (Early Years, Junior and Secondary) on which learning programmes and assessment procedures will be designed leading to the expected levels of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

10   The Working Group affirms the importance of valuing and accrediting all skills and competencies. The NCF will ensure that students' capacities enable them to achieve access into further and higher education as well as being the prerequisites for employability and mobility. The Learning Outcomes Framework will give due importance to vocational subjects in the Secondary Years Cycle with the scope of providing more diverse pathways of learning leading students to new skills and to new jobs. The range of vocational subjects will be extended during the course of NCF.

11   As a **quality assurance measure,** the Working Group has determined three occasions for benchmarking and two occasions for monitoring during compulsory education. Benchmarking will take place at the end of the Early Years Cycle, at the end of the Junior Years Cycle and at the end of the Secondary School Cycle. Assessment will be on an individual level at the juncture between Year 2 and Year 3, and at the end of Year 6. These benchmarking exercises will be compulsory for State schools while Church and Independent schools will be invited to participate. At the end of Year 11, the SEC examination results will continue to have a benchmarking function as well.

In addition, there will be periodic non-intrusive external monitoring at two points during compulsory education: once during the Junior Cycle and once during the Secondary Cycle. This will involve samples of schools and students in the State, Church and Independent sectors and a specified number of learning areas per year over a cycle of years yet to be determined covering the different areas.

12   Whilst children will not be formally assessed in the **Early Years Cycle** their development and progress will be recorded and reported to parents at least twice a year. Formative assessment is advocated for this Cycle as it is highly appropriate to capture children's individual progress and development. The learning programmes developed for this Cycle are to lead to the learning outcomes of this Cycle. It further reaffirms the purposes and aims for the Early Years.

13 The Working Group reaffirms the **Junior Years Cycle** as an important milestone in the educational journey of learners as it consolidates and builds upon the learning experiences of the Early Years Cycle of education and prepares learners for the transition into the Secondary Cycle of education. It further reaffirms the purposes and aims for the Junior Years and adds the general learning outcomes for this Cycle.

14 The Working Group establishes that the **subject content** in the different Learning Areas of the Junior Years Cycle will be streamlined according to realities of the school year in order to enable educators to make use of pedagogies that are student-centred, inquiry-based, integrated with the cross-curricular themes and supported by an eLearning based approach.

15 The NCF acknowledges that **formative** assessment should be balanced and supplemented with **summative** assessment in the Junior Years Cycle. Colleges and Schools are encouraged to carry out a summative assessment directed to assist teachers and students to obtain an indication of the development of knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes achieved in the different Learning Areas at least once prior to the end of this Cycle.

16 The Working Group reaffirms the **Secondary Years Cycle** as an important milestone in the educational journey of learners as it consolidates and builds upon the learning experiences of the Junior Years Cycle of education and prepares learners for the wider challenges they will face beyond compulsory schooling. It further reaffirms the purposes and aims for the Secondary Years and adds the general learning outcomes for this cycle.

17 The Working Group re-affirms the **Option Subjects** as presented in the draft NCF with the exception of English Literature which is to remain as part of the core English lessons. The range of vocational subjects will be extended during the course of the NCF. The current practice of having two SEC examinations: one for English Language and one for English Literature is to continue. It is further recommended that this practice should be considered for Maltese as well. Furthermore, the high competency levels in foreign language teaching and learning developed by young people in Malta during the compulsory schooling which has been confirmed in the results of the *European Survey on Language Competences – 2011* must be sustained in our education system.

18 The Working Group affirms that the **setting of examinations** in the State Sector of education will be delegated to Colleges for particular year groups once they acquire the necessary skills and capacity and achieve an increased level of professional development. Where the setting of examinations is devolved to Colleges such Colleges will be subject to continued quality assurance and review which will be carried out by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

19 The Working Group presents the recommended minimum **entitlement** for each of the eight Learning Areas in the Junior Years, Lower Secondary and Senior Secondary Years thus providing flexibility for school-based decisions of up to 15%, 20% and 25% of curriculum time in the three categories respectively.

20 The Working Group cautions that for the NCF to be successfully implemented the sustained and continued **up-skilling** and **re-skilling** of educators' competencies to deliver the new pedagogies requires a structured professional development programme that goes beyond what the current structure for training permits. The Working Group underlines that there is a need for the Directorates to consult with the Malta Union of Teachers

21 The Working Group recommends that the Minister for Education and Employment establishes a **Working Group to addres**s the **implicatio**ns of the NCF for further and higher education. The purpose of this Working Group would be to ensure a smooth progression from compulsory to post-secondary education. This Working Group should be led by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education.

Review of the
National Curriculum Framework
and the Way Forward

Part I

01 Review of the National Curriculum Framework following the Consultation Process

01.1 A Sustained Process of National Consultation

The draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF) was placed in the public domain on 17th May 2011. A comprehensive consultation process was carried out by the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) within the Ministry of Education and Employment (MEDE) with all the stakeholders.

The consultation process included:

- 56 consultation meetings with, amongst others, constituted bodies, political parties, representatives from State, Church and Independent schools, the general public, parents and students.

- A consultation day organised in all schools in the State, Church and Independent sectors.

- Comprehensive surveys amongst the education professionals and students in the State, Church and Independent sectors.

- An invitation for the formal submission of written responses from all interested stakeholders

A Report on the analysis of the feedback received was placed in the public domain by MEDE[2] on 14th August 2012. In spite of different and conflicting views the Report concluded that there was a high level of convergence of views expressed. This is an overview of some of the salient points identified in the Report:

- A quasi unanimous agreement on the general Principles and the Aims of education of the draft NCF.

- The challenges and issues raised pertain primarily to the implementation detail of the NCF.

- General agreement that the vision presented with regard to Science Education is laudable; that the proposed Core Science subject should not become a soft option; that students should be allowed to choose one Science subject; that well planned re-skilling is required with current teachers who are mainly grounded in Mathematics and Physics.

- General agreement that investment is required to strengthen, up-skill and re-skill teachers, school leaders and educators if the NCF is to succeed.

- General agreement that the successful implementation of a differentiated teaching environment needs investment in capacity building; increased teacher resource allocation; improved teacher to student ratio where necessary; less syllabus content; more flexibility provided to a teacher with regard to pedagogies in the classroom environment.

- Quasi unanimous agreement that an inquiry-based approach and student-centred learning require a significant reduction in the syllabi content.

- The Learning Area on Citizen Education is, in the main, criticized as it is feared that it will result in the marginalisation of Geography, History and Social Studies as separate disciplines.

- Consistent agreement that implementation should be carefully planned, that it must be phased in, and that students, teachers and parents are placed at the heart of the reform process.

- Where expressed, there is agreement with the recommendation to re-introduce Accounts and Economics as Option subjects.

- Where expressed, there is concern on how the proposed reforms will impact the Personal and Social Development subject.

- General agreement with the introduction of a separate Ethics subject for students whose parents do not wish them to be educated in the Roman Catholic Faith. It is also stated that this approach should not impinge on the autonomy of Church schools with regard to Religious Education

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2   The feedback can be viewed on the following url: https://www.education.gov.mt/Page.aspx?pid=543

given that the ethos of Church education is based on the value system as underpinned by the Roman Catholic Faith.

• Whilst in general, agreement is espoused with regard to the introduction of an Ethics subject, various and different views are expressed on what should constitute the syllabus of this subject; and who should formulate the syllabus, among other considerations.

• Quasi unanimous critique that the timetables proposed were too rigid and inflexible and that they do not reflect the ethos espoused within the draft NCF itself. The fact that the introduction of the professional development time is limited to the Secondary Education Cycle is also critiqued.

• Whilst there is agreement on the need of a language policy a myriad of different recommendations were presented with regard to what should constitute a language policy.

• Quasi universal agreement that Malta has become a multi-cultural society and that all schools should be in a position to provide children and their parents with language support in Maltese and English so that they achieve a basic working knowledge of these languages at the earliest possible in order to allow them to integrate quickly.

• The feedback is mixed on the recommendation to expose pupils in Primary Schools to a foreign language: with those against the concept maintaining that Primary Schools should concentrate on ensuring that pupils obtain a sound grasp of the Maltese and English Languages respectively, particularly given the noticeable depreciation in the command of either language.

• Universal agreement that the recommendation to establish English Literature as an Option subject in Form 3 (Year 9) is not correct and that this recommendation will have a negative impact on the number of students accessing a range of English Literature texts.

• General agreement that if the recommendation to reduce the number of hours for the third foreign language in the Secondary Cycle of education is maintained then the syllabus and content is to be reduced accordingly.

• Quasi-universal agreement on the proposed balanced approach to assessment and evaluation.

• Quasi universal concern that directs parental involvement in the education of their children is decreasing as increasingly both parents are active in the labour market.

• Quasi universal concern that the successful implementation of the principles proposed in the NCF requires a continuum of education in Post-Secondary education.

• Limited feedback on Mathematics; Technology; eLearning; Education for Sustainable Development; Education for Entrepreneurship; Creativity and Innovation; Student Involvement and School Management, amongst others. Feedback was, however, received which recommended modifying 'eLearning' to 'Digital Literacy' which should eventually do away with ICT as a timetabled subject.

• Certain stakeholders criticised the NCF on the basis that it makes limited reference to gender issues and no reference to sexual orientation issues.

• Feedback received suggested that the NCF does not address in depth issues relating to challenging behaviour, discipline, bullying, etc.

• Concern that the NCF is utilitarian in its approach given that it places undue emphasis on preparing students for the labour market and that it places lifelong learning as an individual responsibility as against a responsibility that the State has for the provision of lifelong education.

01.2 Position of the Working Group after Analysis of the Feedback Received

01.2.1 A Framework for the National Curriculum
It is important to underline that the Working Group is presenting a **Framework** for a national curriculum. In the feedback it is evident that a number of stakeholders perceived the framework as a National Curriculum which reflects the curricula of the subjects taught and that it should even look into matters such as discipline and bullying amongst others.

A NCF is neither of these things. Rather, a NCF establishes the essential indicators with regard to the knowledge, skills and competencies as well as attitudes and values that are to be taught in a statutory manner in order to lead to expected

learning outcomes. The ethos of the NCF reflects the contribution that education makes to Malta's national social and economic development.

A NCF defines what a student will know and be able to do as a result of undergoing formal education. A NCF seeks to balance timeless knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes with new knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes. This constitutes a considerable challenge given the limitations of the school year on the one hand and the magnitude of the body of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values that can be delivered to learners on the other

Additionally, a NCF must also address the deliverers of the curriculum: the school leaders, teachers and other educators. It must also address the parents who are key to the success of the curriculum. While school leaders are bound to provide strategic direction, resources and support, the professional teacher is the best placed person to evaluate what is being achieved and to secure continuous improvement. It is then parents who are best placed to reinforce, at home, the values and educational experience that their child obtains from the school. The main tenets of the Curriculum as presented in the draft Framework are re-affirmed.

Conclusion 01
The Working Group affirms that this document presents a National Curriculum Framework on which the Learning Outcomes Framework as well as the Learning and the Assessment Programmes at all levels of pre-school and compulsory education should be based.

01.2.2 The Principles and Aims of the New National Curriculum Framework

01.2.2.1 The Principles

The consultation feedback showed that there is agreement with both the general Principles and Aims for education as presented in the draft NCF. One point made in the consultation process, and which the Working Group takes note of, is that the contribution of education should not be limited to knowledge and content – towards which, it is stated, Malta's educational system is disproportionately biased. It is expressed that a functional outcome of education is, also, that of imbuing students – tomorrow's adults – with a value system that reflects the moral and ethical fibre of a Maltese and European citizen. The education process, therefore, must also

contribute to a value system that reflects attitudes and beliefs that include, but are not limited to, democracy, inclusivity, openness, tolerance, transparency and diversity.

The principle of **entitlement** to education ensures the development of a learner as he or she progresses during his or her life cycle to an adolescent, and subsequently to an adult with a value system of a responsible and engaged citizen and one who is equipped with the competences, amongst others, to lead, to challenge, to analyze, to be innovative and creative, and to accommodate for and acquire new skills and knowledge.

With regard to the principle of **diversity**, the feedback suggested that the draft NCF adopted a narrow view as it did not differentiate between the unique education requirements of different stakeholders – whether these are women, ethnic minorities, persons with different sexual orientation or persons with disabilities. The Working Group concludes that such criticism is not just. The draft NCF embraces diversity in all its forms. Indeed, it establishes this principle as one of the tenets that underpin the NCF.

The principle of the **continuum of achievement** should be such that it allows a learner to follow, from amongst different education pathways, the best pathway that will allow him or her to reach the maximum of his or her potential - irrespective of whether the student is a high flyer, has average abilities, basic abilities and/or has a disability. In this regard the Working Group sought to establish a framework that would assume, to the extent possible, that no student becomes a casualty of an education system that is unable to identify those learners who require encouragement and guidance. Equally importantly, the Working Group presents a NCF that allows for the introduction of different pathways that will truly allow a learner to develop his or her abilities in the manner best suited for him or her.

Although stakeholders agree with the principle of **learner-centred learning** most believe that it can only be successfully implemented if the content of subject curricula is reduced. Additionally, the feedback further underlines that a pedagogy that is learner-centred must also be reflected in the School Education Certificate (SEC) examinations. Furthermore, the feedback emphasises that such a new paradigm will need to be reflected in Post-Secondary education. The feedback argues that unless there is this continuity between compulsory education and Post-Secondary education then the achievements of an education system that is based on principles of learner centricity and inquiry-based thinking will break down. This will result because learners who progress to Post-Secondary education will now

be exposed to a learning experience that is still based on the educational ethos that pre-dated the NCF. The Working Group agrees with the concerns expressed on this matter.

The Working Group notes that the critical feedback with regard to the principle of **quality assurance** is presented by all of the three education sectors. The Church and the Independent schools, although both agreeing that quality assurance is a key principle, maintain that the current process should be low on bureaucracy. Moreover, they underline that the NCF should respect the good practices they have within their respective schools. On the other hand, feedback from the State sector indicated that quality assurance is viewed as "intrusive" and that it is "degrading" to professionals who are already "checked and filtered and assessed". The Working Group deems quality assurance to be a cardinal building block of the NCF. Quality assurance is the framework and process through which the quality of education is assessed and on the basis of which timely and corrective intervention measures can be adopted as and where appropriate. The Working Group concludes that whilst there will be no compromises on the principle of quality assurance across the three Cycles of education it will work with all the appropriate stakeholders to ensure that the methodologies introduced reflect best practice – including local best practices in the different sectors.

The Working Group modifies the principle relating to teacher support to '**Teacher Professional Support**'. The Working Group recognises that teachers and school leaders are pivotal to the success of the NCF. To successfully implement the NCF they will need to be trained, at times up-skilled as well as re-skilled, in the new pedagogy – ranging from matters such as differentiated teaching to learner-centred learning. Training and continued professional development, therefore, are key priorities towards which MEDE, the DQSE and the Malta Union of Teachers (MUT) are to work together to secure the best enabling environment.

The Working Group recognises that teachers need time to discuss, plan and share best practices to achieve excellence in the teaching they provide. In this regard, the Working Group acknowledges that the weekly 90 minute curriculum and teaching planning time in the Primary school should be sustained in a structured manner. Complementary to this, is the weekly subject/departmental meeting in Secondary schools.

> **Conclusion 02**
>
> The Working Group re-affirms the **principles of education** relating to Entitlement; Diversity; Continuum of Achievement; Learner Centred Learning; Quality Assurance; and Teacher Professional Support.

01.2.2.2   The Aims

To a large extent, the feedback shows agreement with the Aims as presented in the draft NCF. There was, however, a small yet influential group of stakeholders who underlined that:

- The role of education should not be that of primarily satisfying Malta's economic needs. Whilst this is acknowledged to be important it is underlined that education should never be placed in a subservient role to the economy particularly if the child is to be placed at the very centre of the educational system.

- In the event that the education system is subservient to the economy then the education system might succumb to displaced priorities and the valuation of "utilitarian" benefits above the human person. Such an approach, it is underlined, may result in confusing priorities that are detrimental not only to persons but also to institutions and society in the long term. It is argued, therefore, that values, social justice, respect for diversity, increasing knowledge and ensuring that fewer persons opt out of the compulsory education Cycle are as important as the economic dimensions that the Curriculum is to address.

- The NCF should not adopt a language that seeks to emphasise that the individual is "fully and solely (or together with parents)" responsible for his or her learning and therefore life chances. It is pointed out that the NCF should underpin the notion of 'lifelong education' rather than 'lifelong learning'. An approach towards lifelong education places responsibility also on the State to ensure that every person, irrespective of age, gains access to educational experiences which he or she is entitled to.

The Working Group discussed these concerns. The Working Group disagrees with the statement that the NCF is primarily focused on the contribution of education to the economic dimension. In the Aims presented in the NCF, there is reference to the aim of education with regard to the:

- Personal: that is, the education of students to promote the intellectual, spiritual, moral and physical development of individuals.

- Social: that is, the education of students to enable them to participate in families, communities and the life of the nation.

It is, however, recognised that reference to social justice is implied rather than explicitly stated. To address this, the Working Group places the appropriate emphasis in the relevant Aim of education to bring out more clearly the importance of social justice as a contribution of education. The Working Group defines social justice in education to mean:

- All students, irrespective of background and ability, are provided with an education that will allow them to develop to the maximum of their potential.

- The introduction of a new education culture which minimises, to the extent possible, de-motivators that lead learners to drop out of formal education due to reasons such as lack of connection with the school, perceptions that the school is boring, lack of motivation, academic challenges, personal backgrounds and community contexts. Addressing such de-motivators will result in a decrease in the dropout rate of students.

- The introduction of a new education culture where learning is a process that enables students to make their voices heard in the wider world and thereby exerts influence over the future direction of their own lives and communities.

Whilst recognising the importance of learners who are engaged citizens **who are able to strive for social justice** in constantly changing local, regional and global realities, the Working Group also recognises the paramount importance of the economic dimension in education. In a global environment that is increasingly becoming more complex, knowledge-based, and intrinsically intertwined with information, communications and technology the education system cannot be divested from the importance of the ability of Malta's future adults to successfully make the transition not just into employment, but into value-added employment. The development of Malta's vision as a high value-added knowledge and service base economy, as well as becoming one of the leading Member States in implementing the EU 2020 Strategy, will not be achieved if the NCF isolates itself from the nation's economic aspirations and goals.

A further contribution of the education system to the economic dimension is that of strengthening Malta's comparative advantages. Malta's human resource capital constitutes a comparative advantage. Studies show that foreign and local employers consider Maltese workers to be hard-working, flexible, intelligent, adaptable, trainable and diligent but caution that "potential dangers lurk: entrepreneurial spirit, discipline, work ethos, self-development in young and emerging workers are perceived to be regressing when compared to workers who are 30 years of age and over."[3] A second comparative advantage is the English and Multi-lingual skills base developed during schooling. This is seen to give Malta an added edge on mainstream Europe and North Africa as English is both *the* business language and *the* technology and ICT language; the safeguarding of the ability to write and speak good English is imperative. Here too, however, studies caution that "potential dangers lurk [as] young and emerging workers are seen to have a lower command of the English language compared to workers who are 30 years of age and over."[4] The high competency levels in foreign language teaching and learning developed by young people in Malta during the compulsory schooling have been confirmed in the results of the *European Survey on Language Competences – 2011.* This strength must be sustained in our education system.

In today's complex world the reality is that the economic, social, political, and environment ripples of nations at the other end of the world have a quasi immediate and pervasive impact on Malta's well being. In the face of such a reality the contribution of Malta's education system towards the development of learners who can manage such global affects by having the necessary knowledge, competencies and skills to allow them to re-skill themselves and have increased mobility becomes imperative.

Equally important, however, is the fact that an education system that equips tomorrow's future adults with knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values to make the transition to employment will be more likely to secure a state of play which allows them to enjoy a quality of life based on their self worth. Securing the values, knowledge, competencies and skills to enjoy employment is, also, a form of social justice as it ensures that they do not run the risk of becoming dependent on the State for their well-being because the education system would have failed them.

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3   Pg 33, Industry Strategy for Malta: 2007 – 2010: Enabling Industry to Achieve High Value Added and Productivity Growth, Department of Information, 2006
4   Ibid

The Working Group re-affirms the **aims of education** as (i) Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners; (ii) Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work; and (iii) Learners who are responsibly engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities.

01.2.3   The Learning Areas

01.2.3.1   The Early Years

The consultation feedback with regard to the Early Years Cycle of education was positive. The main concerns expressed on the Early Years are a need for:

- The strengthening of the transition process between Kindergarten and Years 1 and 2.

- A structured process that allows for the early identification of learners who are struggling in meeting the learning outcomes so that the appropriate action is taken at the right time.

- A pedagogy based and contextualised on learning outcomes and their determinants: that is the particular knowledge, competencies, skill, attitude or value that a learner is expected to develop and exhibit at the end of the Early Years Cycle.

01.2.3.2   The Primary and Secondary Years

Following a review of the feedback received, the Working Group presents the following changes in the Learning Areas.

Languages	For both Maltese and English, the exposure to language learning is to be interpreted in the broader sense and thus incorporate both language and literature with at least a minimum of half the lessons being devoted to the development of the different language skills. In addition to the compulsory languages (Maltese and English), learners choose one or two foreign languages during their Secondary years. Students following individual learning programmes may have some adaptation to this entitlement.
Mathematics	This Learning Area will include financial literacy aspects such as mathematical and financial understanding as learning outcomes.
Science and Technology	This Learning Area is directed to provide a clear understanding across the education Cycles of how the process of inquiry and investigation leads to the development of solutions and their application. This is to be achieved through a pedagogical approach of "purposeful design and inquiry" that combines technological design with scientific inquiry, engaging students or teams of students in scientific inquiry situated in the context of technological problem-solving.
Health & Physical Education	This Learning Area remains unchanged from the original proposals presented in the Draft Consultation Document.
Religious and Ethics Education	The Working Group acknowledges the importance of an alternative programme to Catholic Religious Education (CRE) for students opting out of CRE. This is being identified as Ethics Education. It also recognises the position presented by the Church Schools namely that the essence of their schools is deeply rooted in a core set of beliefs derived from the Catholic Religious Faith. The Working Group therefore recommends the delivery of an Ethics Education Programme provided that the ethos of each individual school and / or logistical considerations, allow this provision. An Ethics Education Programme is preferred over a Comparative Religious Education programme.

Humanities	The consultation feedback was negative with regard to the placement of Geography and History within the Citizenship Education Learning Area. This concern is now addressed by placing the study of Geography and History in a specifically focused Learning Area.
Education for Democracy	Education for Democracy will replace the Citizenship Education Learning Area and will be directed towards developing responsible citizens. The Working Group recommends that aspects of Environmental Studies, Social Studies, Personal and Social Development and Home Economics related to Consumer Education are placed within this learning area. The Working Group acknowledges elements of overlap between this Learning Area and the Humanities Learning Area.
Visual and Performing Arts	The consultation feedback with regard to the Arts Education Learning Area was positive. It underlined that given the emphasis on the four disciplines of dance, music, theatre and visual art, it would be more correct if this Learning Area is termed as Visual and Performing Arts.

Conclusion 04

The Working Group establishes the **Learning Areas** for the Junior and Secondary school cycles of education to be Languages; Mathematics; Science and Technology; Health and Physical Education; Religious and Ethics Education, Humanities, Education for Democracy and Visual and Performing Arts.

01.2.4 The Cross Curricular Themes

The Working Group notes that the consultation feedback with regard to the introduction of cross curricular themes was limited – though where presented it was primarily positive. Following an assessment of the feedback, the Working Group presents the following changes.

Literacy	The foundational nature of literacy as a prerequisite to all learning has been repeatedly highlighted internationally, such that through the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) international surveys, as well as very recently in the Report 'Literacy for All' launched in September 2012 by the EU High Level Group of Experts on Literacy[5]. Placing Literacy as the first cross-curricular theme highlights the fact that all learning happens primarily through language in its various forms, and that therefore all educators need to see themselves as guarantors of the language mastery required of their learners in their particular area of knowledge.
Digital Literacy	Through this cross curricular theme students will acquire skills that include confident and critical use of Information Society Technology for communication, work and leisure. They will acquire basic skills in ICT organised around four major overlapping strands: data sources and manipulation; information communication and presentation; programmed control; and social, ethical and personal aspects.
Learning to Learn and Co-operative Learning	Learning to learn is seen to be a priority in Malta's education context as it provides the ability to pursue and persist in learning – which in turn ties to increased importance of lifelong learning within a knowledge society and economy. The co-operative learning concept allows a learner to actively engage with his or her peers. In doing so they are together able to learn several processes such as processing and synthesising information, solving problems, and creating products together. Such a context also allows for social development among students. This will ensure that the learning moves towards learner-centred approaches.
Education for Sustainable Development	This cross curricular theme remains unchanged from the original proposals presented in the draft Consultation document.

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5   The Report is available at: http://ec.europa.eu/education/literacy/what-eu/high-level-group/documents/literacy-final-report_en.pdf

Education for Entrepreneurship Creativity and Innovation	The National Strategy for Research and Innovation: 2007-2010, and subsequently reinforced by the draft 2011-2020 Research and Innovation Strategy respectively establish a rational need for the development of a pro-innovation culture supportive of invention, risk-taking and entrepreneurship. Thus, the Working Group, in order to assure coherency with the 2011 – 2020 National Strategy for R&I, converges the previously separate cross curricular themes of Education for Entrepreneurship and Creativity and Innovation as one cross curricular theme entitled 'Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation'.
Education for Diversity	The cross curricular theme of Intercultural Education as presented in the draft NCF, is too narrow and tends to limit diversity to multiculturalism. The Working Group agrees that this theme should seek to imbue values that respect diversity. This encompasses that an individual is unique and recognises individual differences whether these stem from dimensions of race; ethnicity; gender; sexual orientation; socio-economic status, age; physical, mental or intellectual abilities; religious beliefs; political beliefs; or other ideologies.

Conclusion 05

The Working Group establishes the **Cross Curricular Themes** for the Junior and Secondary School cycles of education to be Literacy; Digital Literacy; Learning to Learn and Co-operative Learning; Education for Sustainable Development; Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation and Education for Diversity.

01.2.5 Assuring that Every Learner Makes a Successful Transition across the Education Cycles

The Working Group underlines that the task of the school leader and the teacher in today's and tomorrow's schools is to focus on the individual learner. This implies a profiling of each and every child. The application of profiling should start in the Early Years and be carried forward into compulsory education. The DQSE will assume the responsibility to ensure that every child carries a profile of his and her progress and achievements in the knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values as detailed in this NCF. Success will be recorded, and additional support will be given as required to ensure that children have access to their learner's entitlement.

Thus, the NCF respects diverse forms of learning and understanding, and does not provide a one size-fits-all formula. Teachers need to operate flexibly within this framework to reach the specific learning outcomes that young people ought to possess at the end of a learning process. The NCF encourages quality education based on active learning and understanding to minimise shallow learning of knowledge which, at a later stage, will be forgotten or not used at all. The Working Group's understanding of education within this NCF is that of a process of learning which translates into what learners know and are able to do.

The Working Group underlines that every person has the right to employment, to a decent living and to personal and social integration within society. Schools therefore need to ensure that the necessary knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values are given within compulsory education.

Conclusion 06

The Working Group underlines that educators are to use the NCF to develop learners' capacity to nurture values and learn key skills and competences that they require to establish their long-term quality of life as persons and as citizens – and in doing so educators are to regard learners as individuals with diverse capacities that must be supported to develop into lifelong learners equipped with employability-related attitudes and skills. The Directorates[6] will work with the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta, Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST, Institute for Tourism Studies (ITS), and the Council for the Teaching Profession to ensure the adequate continuous professional development of all educators.

To achieve these ~~six~~ conclusions, the Working Group established the Cycles of education as follows:

Early Years Cycle			
KG I	KG II	Y1	Y2

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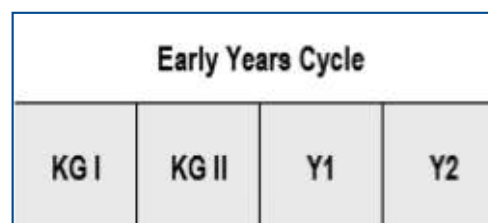
6 'Directorates' always refers to the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education and the Directorate for Educational Services.

The Early Years Cycle will integrate the period from KGI to Year 2. This integration ensures continuity in the development of the child between KGI to Year 2 at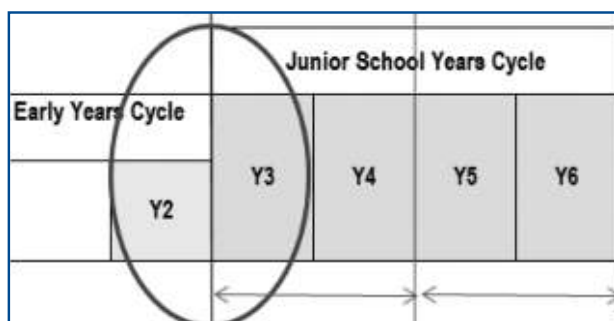 his or her pace of learning and thereby allowing for everyone to integrate in the system. Additionally integrating the period between the kindergarten years and Years 1 and 2 allows for the design of a seamless learning outcomes framework for the Early Years. This will minimise the existing transition problems between KGII and Year 1 (strongly emphasised in the consultation feedback) due to the considerable stepping-up that learners are expected to make in Year 1. Moreover, the design of a Learning Outcomes Framework for the Early Years Cycle will ensure that each child will have the appropriate preparation for the subsequent transition into the Junior Years Cycle.

The Junior Years Cycle will cover Year 3 to Year 6 – which is the period within which learning becomes formalised. In State schools as well as in a number of Church and Independent Schools learners sit for a formal examination for the first time. The Junior Years Cycle will be structured in a manner that identifies learners who may be struggling as they move into Year 3 or as they progress within the Junior School Cycle so that the appropriate guidance and encouragement is provided to such learners at the right time.

The Secondary Years Cycle includes Years 7 to 11. Year 7 (Form I) of the Secondary Years Cycle anchors the transition from the final year of the Junior Years Cycle to the acquirement of the Learning Outcomes by the end of Year 8 (Form II). In doing so, it will seek to ensure that by Year 8 (Form II) a learner would have acquired the learning outcomes that would allow him or her to successfully make the transition between Year 9 (FIII) to Year 11 (FV).

Conclusion 07

The Working Group establishes the following **three education Cycles** which, whilst being distinct, allow for the reinforcement of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values with regard to the transition from one Cycle to another:

Early Years Cycle   KGI KGII Y1 Y2

Junior Years Cycle   Y3 Y4 Y5 Y6

Secondary Years Cycle   Y7 Y8 Y9 Y10 Y11.

01.2.6 Governance Structure to Align Learning and Assessments to Learning Outcomes

The NCF, through the Principles and Aims of education, establishes the learning that students should achieve at the end of a significant educational experience. The build-up to this educational experience is achieved through the identification of learning outcomes set for each Cycle of education. The learning outcomes are a tool to describe and define learning and assessment processes as well as achievements. By using learning outcomes to describe the learning processes and outcomes, the NCF is addressing the interests of the student and the stakeholders in a learner-centred way. The intended learning outcomes are statements that indicate what learners will have gained as a result of learning that has taken place.

The Working Group has identified the learning outcomes of the three education Cycles. These are presented in the second section of this document.

The subjects within the Learning Areas are to be directed to the learning outcomes of the different Cycles of the NCF. The same principle applies to assessment and examinations. This means that a governance framework that assures a linkage between the learning outcomes, programmes of learning and assessment and examinations, becomes very important. In this regard, the Working Group concludes that a governance framework needs to be set up that enhances and synergises the structures already in place.

The governance framework will be achieved through the setting up of a Learning Outcomes Framework Board which will be chaired by the Director General of the DQSE.. The Learning Outcomes Framework Board will include

stakeholders from the Directorates of Education, the School Sectors, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education, the Faculty of Education, the University of Malta, the MATSEC Board and the Council for the Teaching Profession amongst others. It will be responsible for:

- Learning outcomes of the Early Years from K1 to Y2.

- Learning outcomes of the Learning Areas and Cross Curricular themes from Year 3 to Year 11.

- Specific outcomes for each subject within the Learning Area which also include the cross curricular themes from Year 3 to year 11.
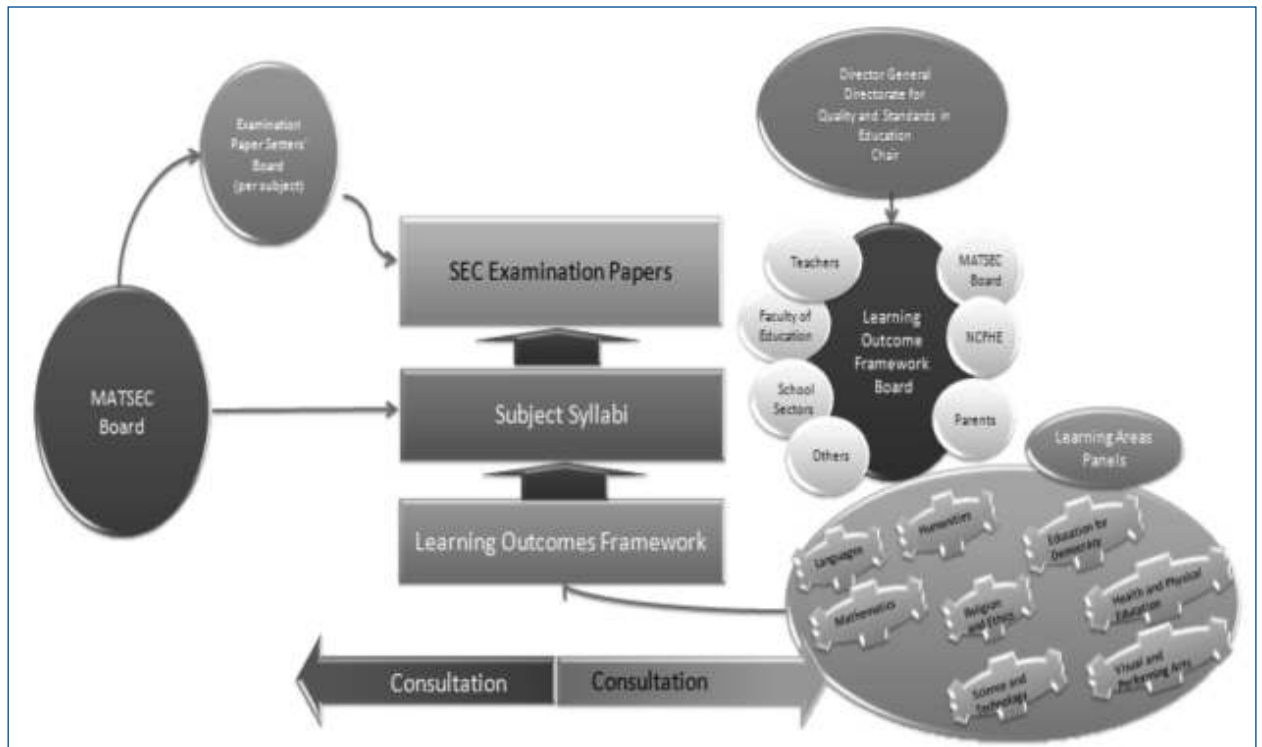
Figure 01:   Relationship between Learning Outcomes, Programmes of Learning and Assessment, and Examinations

The programmes of learning and assessment for each subject will be designed by Learning Areas Panels constituted from the different stakeholders working under the governance of the Learning Outcomes Framework Board. The SEC examinations set by the MATSEC Board will also reflect the same outcomes.

Conclusion 08

The Working Group establishes that the programmes of learning and the standards of assessment and examinations are to be based on the learning outcomes of the National Curriculum Framework and the subsequent **Learning Outcomes Framework.** Assessment in the Early, Junior and Secondary School Years makes an essential contribution to learning and progress at all levels. It is to be seen as an integral part of the learning and teaching process, providing students, educators, and parents with continuous, timely and qualitative feedback about children's progress, giving teachers tools to reflect on their practice, and providing

schools and colleges with information about their curriculum planning, learning and teaching, and achievements. **Examinations and assessments** set at a Secondary Education Certificate level are to reflect the rationale of the NCF and the Learning Outcomes Framework which will be based on a pedagogy that is student-centred, inquiry-based, integrated with the cross-curricular themes, and supported by an e-Learning based approach.

01.2.7   Aligning Learning Outcomes with the Level Descriptors of the Malta's Qualifications Framework

The Working Group contends that the NCF is to respond to consistent developments at the macro levels of the system of education. One important development in the system of education was the setting up in 2007 of the Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (MQF). The MQF Level descriptors at levels 1 to 3 indicate the desired level of knowledge, skills and competences

that every young person needs to achieve in order to move into lifelong learning or employment or both. The 2009 Referencing Report of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF) to the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) gives a detailed account of how the level-descriptors of the first three levels of the MQF build the necessary knowledge, skills and competences to enable young people to move up the ladder of the qualifications framework. The NCF mirrors these level descriptors through the learning areas and specific subjects throughout the years of compulsory education.

The NCF stresses the importance of all learners to acquire core competences particularly those that transverse all other areas of study namely: the Mother tongue and a second language (which in our case means Maltese and English); Mathematics; Science and Technology; and Information Technology/ Digital Literacy. Mastery in these core competences opens a gateway to lifelong learning. In order to ensure that young learners reach the required levels after compulsory education, school leaders and teachers are encouraged to give attention to these key competences in the context of the level-descriptors of the MQF. It is therefore important that school leaders and teachers are familiar with the level-descriptors of the MQF so that they gauge their success through the step-by-step process that the framework itself indicates. For ease of reference, the level descriptors of the MQF at Levels 1, 2 and 3 are included in this document in Appendix IV.

Linked to the MQF is the objective to produce a Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) that emanates from the NCF. As well as the general learning outcomes for the Early Years, the LOF will identify the learning outcomes for the Junior Years and the Secondary School Cycles for the different learning areas/subjects. The LOF will then serve as the reference point on which the different programmes of learning and assessment are to be built.

It is this link between the:

Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning (MQF)
National Curriculum Framework (NCF)
National Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF)

that will provide invaluable guidelines to College Principals, Heads of Schools and teachers.. These three frameworks will be used in a systematic manner as national reference points. The main purpose of the link between the MQF, the NCF and the LOF is that at the end of the compulsory education cycle, young people will have the necessary certification to access further

and higher education and be in possession of a tool that adds value to their life and their employability.

The NCF aims to ensure that young people will be ready to sit for the SEC examinations and other qualifications that may be available at Level 3 of the MQF by the end of compulsory education.

At the same time, however, they will also be provided with the Secondary School Certificate and Profile which records their formal, informal and non-formal learning that would have taken place during the five year Secondary school Cycle. This certificate is pegged at Levels 2 and 1 of the MQF and is awarded subject to the achievement of the criteria indicated.

> ### Conclusion 09
>
> The Working Group establishes that the National Curriculum Framework responds to the descriptors of the first three levels of the **Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning** which in turn is referenced to the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. A National Learning Outcomes Framework will be developed for the three Cycles of education as addressed by this NCF (Early Years, Junior and Secondary) on which learning programmes and assessment procedures will be designed leading to the expected levels of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

01.2.8 Key Competencies, Employability and Mobility

The Working Group underlines that in the Secondary Years Cycle of education VET qualifications will provide alternative routes and pathways into further and higher education thus enabling every student to leverage his or her potential.

Vocational subjects in Secondary school will become routes that will provide more options to learners to develop their potential during compulsory education using pedagogies that are learner-centred and assessments that are quality assured. Such subjects promote the pedagogy of learning by doing and in this regard will be directed to ensure that:

- In a competitive economy new skills are required for new jobs so that people move towards better job quality and working conditions.

- They will provide wider access to education and training later on in the working life.

Whilst affirming the four VET areas presented in the draft NCF (Engineering; Hospitality; IT Practitioner; and Health and Social Care), the Working Group proposes the increase of the option areas in this regard over the course of the NCF.

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Conclusion 10

The Working Group affirms the importance of valuing and accrediting all skills and competencies. The NCF will ensure that students' diverse capacities enable them to achieve access into further and higher education as well as being the prerequisites for employability and mobility. The Learning Outcomes Framework will give due importance to **vocational subjects** in the Secondary Education Cycle with the scope of providing more diverse pathways of learning leading students to new skills and to new jobs. The range of vocational subjects will be extended during the course of the NCF.

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01.2.9 Monitoring and Benchmarking the Performance of the Education System

The Working Group confirms that a monitoring and benchmarking system that gauges the performance of the education system across the three Cycles of education is of vital importance as it will allow the DQSE, together with other stakeholders, to have the necessary data that will allow it to quality assure the practices in schools.

As shown in Figure 02 below, five stages are to be introduced: three for benchmarking and two for monitoring. At the end of the Early Years Cycle (Year 2) at the juncture between Years 2 and 3, at the end of the Junior Years Cycle (Year 6) as well as at the end of the Secondary School Cycle, assessments will be on an individual level. These benchmarking exercises will be compulsory for State Schools while Church and Independent schools will be invited to participate. At the end of Year 11, the SEC examination results will continue to have a benchmarking function as well.

In addition, there will be a periodic non-intrusive external monitoring mechanism at two points: once during the Junior Cycle and once during the Secondary Cycle. This will involve samples of schools and students in the three sectors and a specified number of learning areas per year over a cycle of years yet to be determined covering the different areas.

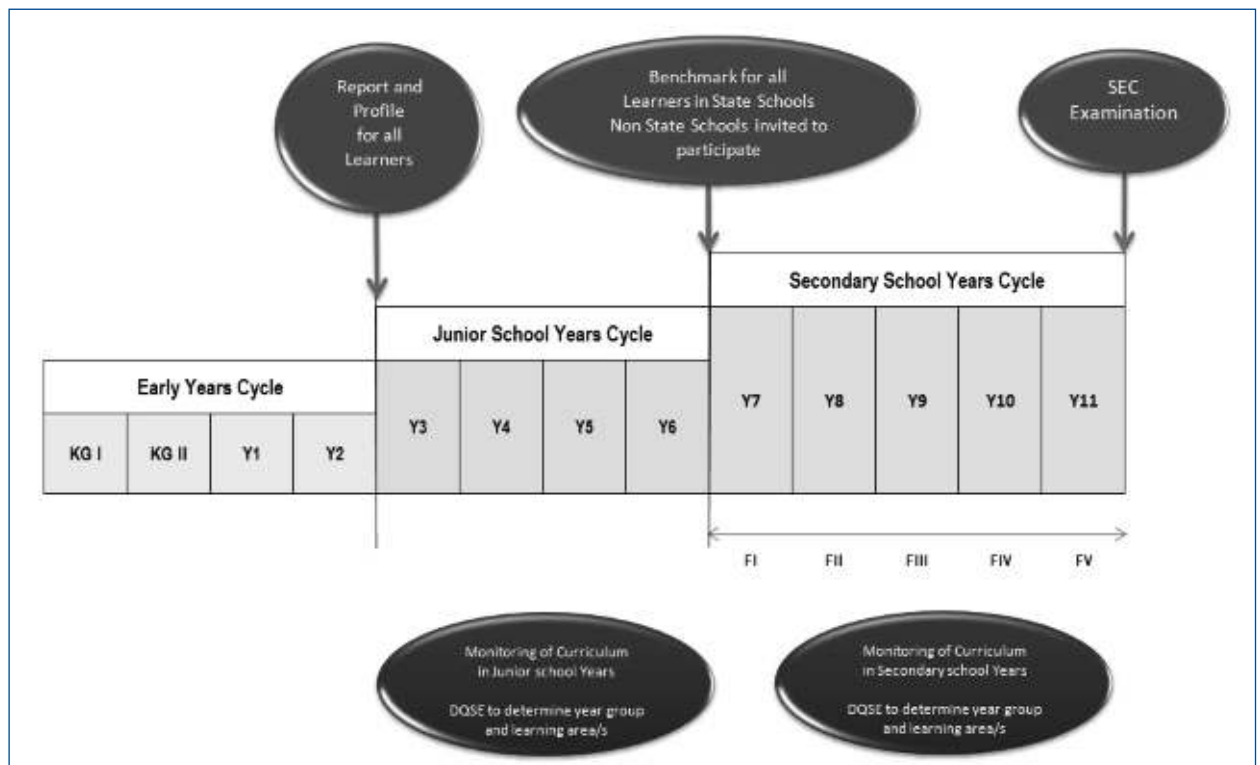**Figure 02:   Monitoring and Benchmarking the Education System**

As a **quality assurance measure, t**he Working Group has determined three occasions for benchmarking and two occasions for monitoring during compulsory education. Benchmarking will take place at the end of the Early Years Cycle, at the end of the Junior Years Cycle and at the end of the Secondary School Cycle. Assessment will be an individual level at the juncture between Years 2 and Year 3 and at the end of Year 6. These benchmarking exercises will be compulsory for State schools while Church and Independent schools will be invited to participate. At the end of Year 11, the SEC examination results will continue to have a benchmarking function as well.

In addition, there will be periodic non-intrusive external monitoring at two points during compulsory education: once during the Junior Cycle and once during the Secondary Cycle. This will involve samples of schools and students in the State, Church and Independent sectors and a specified number of learning areas per year over a cycle of years yet to be determined covering the different areas.

Whilst children will not be formally assessed in the **Early Years Cycle,** their development and progress will be recorded and reported to parents at least twice a year. Formative assessment is advocated for this Cycle as it is highly appropriate to capture children's individual progress and development. The learning programmes developed for this Cycle are to lead to the learning outcomes of this Cycle. It further reaffirms the purposes and aims for the Early Years education.

01.2.10.2 The Junior Years of Education

The Working Group affirms that the Junior Years Cycle is an important milestone in the educational journey of learners. The Junior Years Cycle enables the consolidation of the learning experiences acquired in the Early Years and further builds on these so that learners acquire the knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values on the basis of the learning outcomes that will allow them to successfully make the transition into the Secondary Cycle of education.

01.2.10 The Cycles of Education

01.2.10.1 The Early Years Cycle

The Working Group presents the following reporting and assessment procedures for the Early Years Cycle:

- There will be no formal written assessment during the Early Years Cycle.

- At least twice a year the educator will present to the school and to the parents a report profiling the progress and development of the child with regard to the learning outcomes for that year.

- On the basis of the profile, the school will monitor the child's development as he or she progresses in the Early Years Cycle. This will allow the school to provide appropriate support to the learner as necessary. The introduction of a profiling method of recording and reporting will assure a child's needs are addressed.

- The profile report of each child will be presented to the educator who will be responsible for the child in the forthcoming scholastic year so that the teacher obtains an understanding of the progress and development of the child for whom he or she is responsible and will, thus, be in a position to plan accordingly.

The Working Group reaffirms the **Junior Year Cycle** as an important milestone in the educational journey of learners as it consolidates and builds upon the learning experiences of the Early Years Cycle of education and prepares learners for the transition into the Secondary Cycle of education. It further reaffirms the purposes and aims for Junior school education and adds the general learning outcomes for this Cycle.

The feedback received suggests that the teaching content for Years 3 to 6 is considerable and if the volume of content remains unchanged then it is difficult for the NCF to be implemented in the Junior Years Cycle in a manner that reflect the Principles and Aims of education set by it. The Working Group underlines that the assessment and examinations will be based on the Learning Outcomes Framework for the Junior Years Cycle, and for each respective year of the said Cycle. Thus, the Working Group confirms that the subject content in the different Learning Areas of the Junior Years cycle will be streamlined according to realities of the school year in order to enable school leaders and teachers to make use of pedagogies that are student-centred, inquiry-based, that are integrated with the cross curricular themes and supported by an eLearning based approach.

Conclusion 14

The Working Group establishes that **the subject content in the different Learning Areas** of the Junior Years Cycle will be streamlined according to realities of the school year in order to enable educators to make use of pedagogies that are student-centred, inquiry-based, integrated with the cross-curricular themes and supported by an eLearning based approach.

The Working Group acknowledges that State, Church and Independent schools have different assessment and examination practices. For example, currently State Colleges and Schools apply a summative assessment, the first formal examination that learners would have been exposed to up to that time, in Year 4. It is to be noted, however, that there are Church and Independent Schools which start holding examinations from Year 3, others from Year 5, and others still which hold no examination at all during the Junior Years Cycle. Whilst the Working Group is of the considered opinion that State, Church and Independent schools should maintain control over the policy and practices that they apply on this matter, it recommends that Colleges and Schools in any one of the three sectors should hold at least one summative assessment during the Junior Years Cycle prior to the end of this Cycle. This would assist teachers and students to obtain an indication of the development of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values achieved in the different Learning Areas at least once prior to the end of this Cycle.

Conclusion 15

The National Curriculum Framework acknowledges that **formative** assessment should be balanced and supplemented with **summative assessment** in the Junior Years Cycle. Colleges and Schools are encouraged to carry out summative assessment directed to assist teachers and students to obtain an indication of the development of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values achieved in the different Learning Areas at least once prior to the end of this Cycle.

01.2.10.3   The Secondary Years of Education

The Working Group reaffirms that the Secondary Years Cycle is an important milestone in the learners' educational journey. The Secondary Years Cycle enables learners to build on the knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values required in the Junior Years Cycle to acquire the appropriate learning outcomes that will ensure that learners become responsible citizens, are employable, and able to achieve lifelong learning.

Conclusion 16

The Working Group reaffirms the **Secondary Years Cycle** as an important milestone in the educational journey of learners as it consolidates and builds upon the learning experiences of the Juniors Years Cycle of education and prepares learners for the wider challenges they will face beyond compulsory schooling. It further reaffirms the purposes and aims for Secondary Years and adds the general learning outcomes for this cycle.

The Working Group re-affirms the Option subjects as presented in the draft NCF – with one major exception. The Working Group has taken note of the criticism with regard to divesting English Literature from the teaching of the English subject. Thus, the Working Group presents that the teaching of the English subject is to incorporate both language and literature. Furthermore, it is recommended that the current practice of having two SEC examinations: one for Language and one for Literature is to continue. It is further recommended that this practice should be considered for Maltese as well.

Conclusion 17

The Working Group re-affirms the **Option Subjects** as presented in the draft NCF with the exception of English Literature which is to remain as part of the core English lessons during the course of the NCF. The current practice of having two SEC examinations: one for English Language and one for English Literature is to continue. It is further recommended that this practice should be considered for Maltese as well. Furthermore, the high competency levels in foreign language teaching and learning developed by young people in Malta during the compulsory schooling which has been confirmed in the results of the *European Survey on Language Competences – 2011* must be sustained in our education system.

Whilst the Working Group took note of the feedback presented by a considerable number of Education Officers with regard to the devolution of the setting of examinations to State Colleges and Schools, it maintains the position presented in the draft NCF that as the appropriate skills and capacity are built within Colleges and an increased level of professionalism amongst school leaders and educators is reached through professional development, the design of examination papers for particular year groups will be devolved to Colleges. The setting of examinations by Colleges will be subject to on-going quality assurance and review that will be carried out by the DQSE.

01.2.11 Entitlement

The feedback presented in the draft NCF with regard to the entitlement of learning hours was extremely critical. In reviewing the feedback, the Working Group concluded that it will not present the same level of detail and prescription in the final NCF document. The Working Group is of the considered opinion that a more appropriate approach is that of setting a minimum entitlement to be assigned to each Learning Area together with a proportion of the time the allocation of which will be made by school leaders and educators. This approach will ensure that school leaders and educators will have the appropriate level of empowerment and flexibility to position the level of entitlement in a manner that reflects the ethos and local requirements of Colleges and Schools.

It is important to underline that this approach of establishing percentage minimum entitlement figures for the different Learning Areas is being established for State Colleges and Schools. The Working Group further presents that Church and Independent Colleges and Schools are invited to consider their adoption within their respective Colleges and Schools.

The figure below shows the percentage minimum entitlement for the different Learning Areas in the Junior Years Cycle. The Working Group is of the considered opinion that 60% of the time is dedicated to Maltese, English, Mathematics and Science and Technology. During this Cycle, the school-based decisions make up 15% of the curriculum time available for learning and teaching.

LEARNING AREAS % DISTRIBUTION - JUNIOR YEARS CYCLE

- 30.0% LANGUAGES
- 15.0% MATHEMATICS
- 15.0% SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY
- 5.0% HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION
- 5.0% RELIGIOUS & ETHICS EDUCATION
- 10.0% HUMANITIES & EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY
- 5.0% VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS
- 15.0% SCHOOL-BASED CHOICES
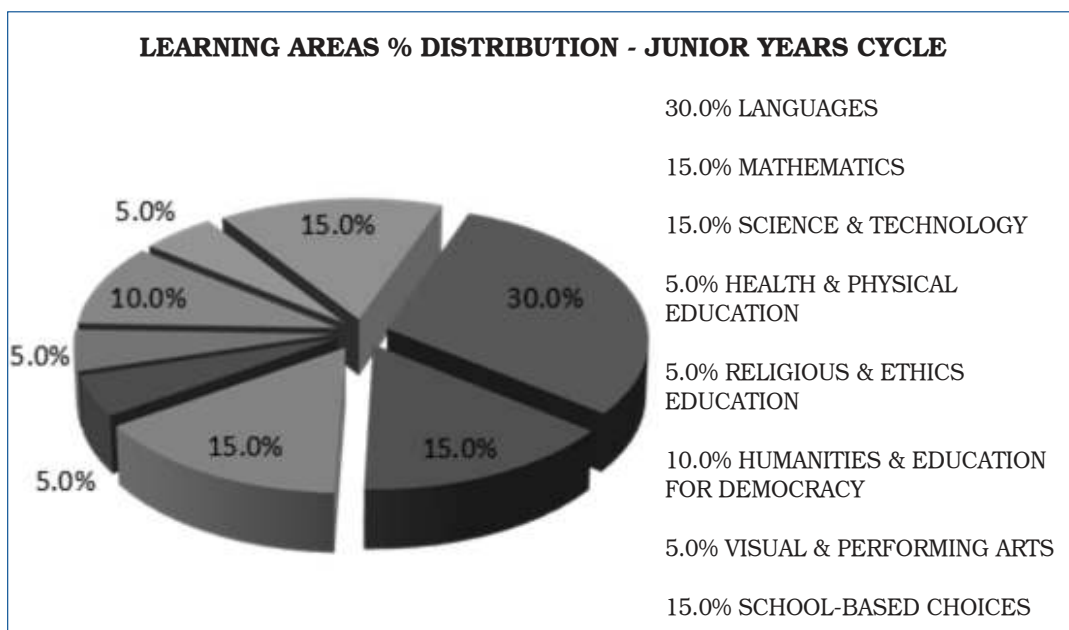
The minimum entitlement for the Secondary Years Cycle is worked out on a 37 to 40 lesson week.
It is to be noted that 30% equates to at least 12 lessons a week and 12.5% equates to at least 5 lessons a week.

During the Secondary Years Cycle the Working Group is of the considered opinion that at least 55% of the time is dedicated to Maltese, English, Mathematics and Science and Technology.

During the lower Secondary Years school-based decisions are to make up 20% of the curriculum time available for learning and teaching, which includes the Optional subjects

LEARNING AREAS % DISTRIBUTION - LOWER SECONDARY YEARS CYCLE

30.0% LANGUAGES

12.5% MATHEMATICS

12.5% SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

5.0% HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

5.0% RELIGIOUS & ETHICS EDUCATION

10.0% HUMANITIES & EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

5.0% VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

20.0% SCHOOL-BASED CHOICES
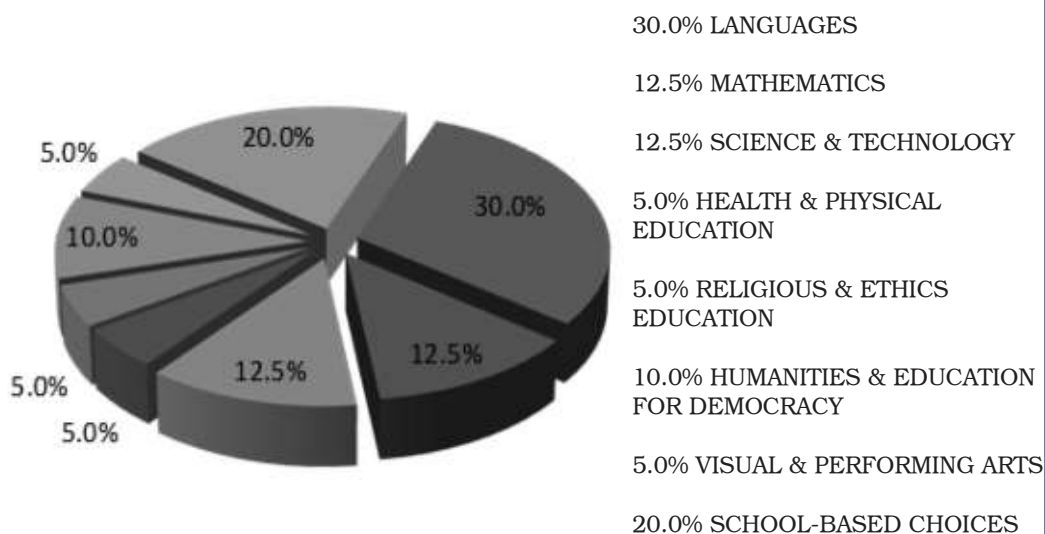
During the senior Secondary Years, school-based decisions will increase to 25% of the curriculum time available in order to allow for the different realities surrounding the Options in the three education Sectors.

LEARNING AREAS % DISTRIBUTION - SENIOR SECONDARY YEARS CYCLE

30.0% LANGUAGES

12.5% MATHEMATICS

12.5% SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

10.0% HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

10.0% RELIGIOUS & ETHICS EDUCATION; HUMANITIES; EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY; VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

25.0% SCHOOL-BASED CHOICES
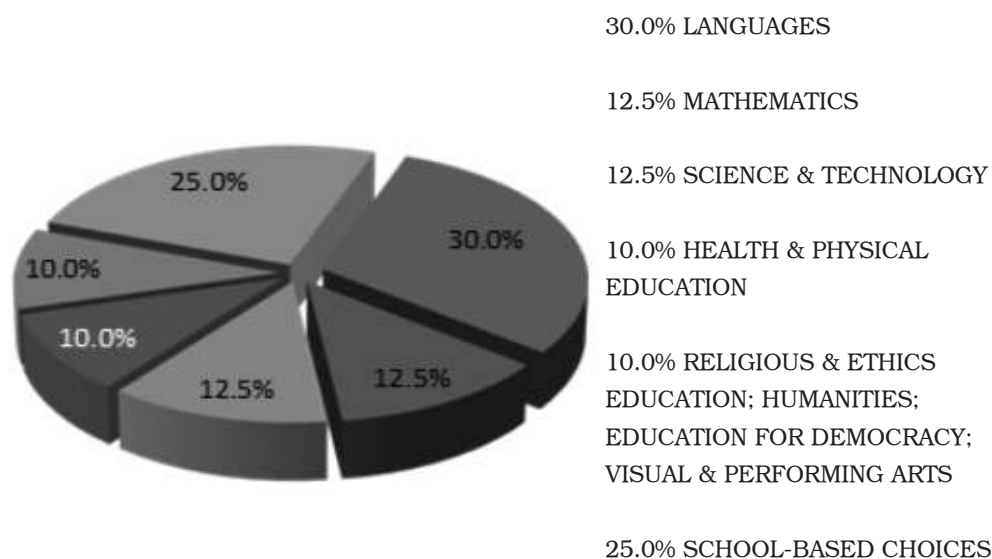
Conclusion 19

The Working Group presents the recommended minimum **entitlement** for each of the eight Learning Areas in the Junior Years, Lower Secondary and Senior Secondary Years thus providing flexibility for school-based decisions of up to 15%, 20% and 25% of curriculum time in the three categories respectively.

01.2.12 Professional Development of Teachers

The College Principals, school leaders and teachers are key actors in the successful implementation of the NCF. The Working Group acknowledges that the NCF supports a pedagogy that requires teachers to have a wider repertoire of skills. Regular curricular support as well as re-skilling and up-skilling of teachers and school leaders is needed to ensure that they have the necessary understanding, skills and tools to be able to successfully deliver the NCF in its complexity.

The Working Group cautions that the level of re-skilling and up-skilling programmes that are to be directed towards school leaders and other educators require more time than the current structure for continuous professional training permits. The Working Group agrees, however, that the time required cannot be secured at the expense of contact teaching time. The Working Group underlines that there is a need for the Directorates to consult with the MUT order to find a solution to this urgent matter that includes ways of encouraging teachers to invest in their own continuous professional development.

Conclusion 20

The Working Group cautions that for the NCF to be successfully implemented, the sustained and continued **up-skilling** and **re-skilling** of educators' competencies to deliver the new pedagogies requires a structured professional development programme that goes beyond what the current structure for training permits. The Working Group underlines that there is a need for the Directorates to consult with the Malta Union of Teachers so that a solution on this urgent matter is presented to the various stakeholders.

01.2.13 Securing Seamless Transition between the Secondary Cycle for Education and Post-Secondary Education

The Working Group recognises the concerns raised by most stakeholders that a NCF based on a student-centred and inquiry-based pedagogy requires a continuum of education not only across the three Cycles of education governed by this document but also with Post-Secondary education and beyond. It is, however, pertinent to underline that the responsibility of the DQSE on the design of the NCF is limited to the three Cycles of education addressed in this document. In this scenario, the Working Group recommends structured and formal discussion on the implications of the NCF for Post-Secondary Education with the interested stakeholders. Indeed, discussions on this matter should commence as soon as possible.

In this regard, the Working Group recommends the setting up of a Working Group to address the implications of the NCF for Post-Secondary Education. This will be stewarded by the Chair of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education and will be constituted of key stakeholders.

Conclusion 21

The Working Group recommends that the Minister for Education and Employment establishes a **Working Group** to address the implications of the NCF for further and higher education. The purpose of this Working Group would be to ensure a smooth progression from compulsory to post-secondary education. This Working Group should be led by the National Commissioner for Further and Higher Education.

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02 Outcomes and Outputs of the National Curriculum and its Implementation

02.1 Outcomes and Outputs of the National Curriculum Framework

The NCF establishes the knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values that a learner is expected to have at the end of the Early Years Cycle (Y2); the end of the Junior Years Cycle (Y6) and at the end of the Secondary Years Cycle (Y11 (FV)). These are presented in the Table below.

The NCF does not prevent schools from enabling children and young people to achieve outcomes additional to those specified in this document.

High Level Representation of knowledge, skills, competencies, attitudes and values that a learner is expected to have at the end of the Early Years Cycle (Y2); the end of the Junior Years Cycle (Y6) and at the end of the Secondary Years Cycle (Y11 (FV))

THE EARLY YEARS CYCLE	THE JUNIOR YEARS CYCLE	THE SECONDARY YEARS CYCLE
Outcome 1: Children who develop a strong sense of identity	**Outcome 1: Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners**	
Children who develop in a safe and secure environment which they can trust. Children who develop a sense of independence and autonomy. Children who become responsible and resilient in the face of challenges.	Children who are confident and able to establish effective relationships with other children and with adults, leading to positive self esteem, self confidence and self awareness.	Young people who acquire personal and social skills required to handle an ever changing social reality. Young people who uphold fundamental democratic values and promote social justice.
Outcome 2: Children who have a positive self-image Children who believe in themselves, fully aware of their potential and capabilities.	Children who are able to value, appreciate and interact with their immediate environment.	Young people who develop a critical, mature and informed outlook of their faith and who respect individuals of different beliefs
Children who gain confidence in themselves and their achievements. Children who develop positive attitudes which enable them to take the initiative and become risk-takers.	Children who competently use the range of age-appropriate language skills in both Maltese and English. Children who are able to recognise and value the importance of foreign language for communication purposes.	Young people who are able to communicate effectively in at least three languages including Maltese and English.
Outcome 3: Children who are socially adept Children who are capable of establishing relationships with others.	Children who are able to apply basic numeracy and problem solving skills.	Young people who are able to apply mathematical and scientific concepts in daily life.
Children who develop empathy, respect and acceptance of different points of view. Children who develop an awareness of the notions of fairness, a sense of justice and non-preferential treatment.	Children who are able to engage confidently with basic levels of technology.	Young people who possess a mastery of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy. Young people who develop an inquiry-based approach to continual learning.

Children who learn to collaborate with peers and adults with diverse backgrounds and needs.	Children who are able to demonstrate a positive disposition towards investigation, designing and making, testing and reporting at elementary levels.	Young people who are able to understand higher order concepts and corresponding underlying principles.
	Children who are able to express their own ideas and experiment with different ways of solving problems.	Young people who are able to think critically and creatively, anticipate consequences, recognise opportunities and are risk-takers.
	Children who are able to appreciate, respond to, participate in and experiment with basic creative performances and expression.	Young people who participate in the creative use of the expressive arts and engage in aesthetic appreciation.
		Young people who are equipped with the necessary qualifications to gain access to further and higher education
Outcome 4: Children who are effective communicators	**Outcome 2: Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work**	
Children who are capable of using different forms of media for communication. Children who interact and engage with varieties of text and printed material increasing their awareness of purposes/functions of print. Children who gain familiarity with symbols and patterns and their use. Children who become aware of different language systems, notably L1 and L2. Children who engage with digital literacy as a means of retrieving data as well as representing and communicating ideas. Children who are versatile with the use of numbers, data handling, shapes and measurement and print in context as a means of production of knowledge and information as well as meaning making and comprehension.	Children who are able to communicate with confidence utilising various communication skills and media.	Young people who are able to communicate confidently and effectively in different social contexts.
	Children who are able to apply basic ICT skills whilst observing netiquette and online safety measures.	Young people who can use and apply a variety of digital technologies.
	Children who are able to learn and to adapt to changes. Children who are able to adapt to an environment of geographic change.	Young people who are motivated to adapt to the changing needs of society through self-evaluation and on-going training
	Children who are able to take the initiative and are capable of working independently and collaboratively. Children who are able to create and to experiment with the basics of entrepreneurship.	Young people who are able to establish and maintain innovative enterprises both individually and in collaboration with others.
	Children who are able to use curiosity for positive judgment.	Young people who are able to ethically prioritise economic values to ensure stability and autonomy.

| | | Young people who show flexibility and are prepared to deal with job mobility.

Young people who are sensitive to the inter-relatedness of the various spheres of life, groups and individuals. |
| :-- | :-- | :-- |
| | Children who appreciate their environment and act positively in favour of sustainability. | Young people who are committed towards the improvement of their quality of life and that of others.

Young people who feel empowered in decision-making processes at the various levels of sustainable development. |
| **Outcome 5: Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners** | **Outcome 3: Learners who are engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities** | |
| Children who develop a range of cognitive skills to include labelling/identifying, recognition, sorting, hypothesising, predicting, comparing, sequencing, and grouping.

Children who develop positive dispositions to include enthusiasm and motivation, curiosity, questioning, concentration, perseverance, imagination, ability to accept alternative suggestions / criticism.

Children who broaden their knowledge and reinforce their understanding through availability of and access to various sources of information. | Children who view diversity as a cohesive force rather than a dividing force. | Young people who value and work in favour of a democratic and inclusive society. |
	Children who appreciate and promote their Maltese culture and heritage.	Young people who appreciate and respect the Maltese culture and heritage.
	Children who appreciate their Mediterranean, European and global contexts.	Young people who take pride in the Maltese identity, heritage and language while recognising and respecting others within a Mediterranean, European and globalised context.
	Children who value and respect difference whilst recognising similarities.	Young people who act in favour of the common good, social cohesion and social justice.
	Children who develop an awareness of their rights and responsibilities as active citizens.	Young people who make and adhere to commitments.
	Children who adopt a healthy and active lifestyle, conscious of the long-lasting implications of their decision in this respect.	Young people who adopt a healthy and active lifestyle and appreciate and know how to make good use of leisure time.

The desired learning outcomes of the NCF will best be gauged at the end of the compulsory Cycle of education of a learner who enters and completes an education system that is consistent with the NCF's Principles and Aims of education. This means that, realistically, the first enrolment of learners in a KGI that reflects the NCF ethos will take place in the scholastic year 2014/2015. A learner who will enter the NCF based education system in 2014/2015 will complete his or her final year of compulsory education under the NCF when he or she completes the final year of his or her Secondary education Cycle (Level 11 (FV)) in the scholastic year 2026/2027.

In essence, therefore, if the education system over the three Cycles of education would have performed and delivered the learning outcomes as planned, then it would be reasonable to assume that the desired outcomes of education would result in the following outputs:

Table 1 : Outcomes of Education 2012 and Targets Set for 2027

	2012	2026/2027
% of 19 year-old students participating in further and higher education excluding Post-Secondary education [7]	-	40%
% of 17 year-old-students participating in further and higher education	80% +	90%
% rate of Students who obtain 1 to 5 Grade in SEC in any five subjects	66.3%	75%
% rate of Students who obtain the Secondary School Certificate and Profile	0%	95%
% of early School leavers[8]	30%[9]	10%[10]
PISA Literacy (Levels 2 to 6)	63.7%	85%
PISA Mathematical Literacy (Levels 2 to 6)	66.4%	80%
PISA Scientific Literacy (Levels 2 to 6)	67.5%	80%
TIMSS Mathematics (Intermediate to Advanced)	60%	70%
TIMSS Science (Intermediate to Advanced)	48%	60%
SurveyLang English (A2-B2)	91%	95%
Italian (A2-B2)	50%	70%

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7   Pg 21, NCHE Further and Higher Education Statistics 2010, Report of the Survey, National Commission for Higher Education, February 2011

8   Early School leavers is defined to mean persons aged 18 to 24 years of age who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training (http://europa.eu/rapit/press-release_MEMO-11-52_en.htm)

9   NSO Estimation, Q2, 2012

10   A learner who enters a NCF based education system in 2013 / 2014 will be 18 years of age in 2027 / 28 and 24 years of age in 2033 / 2034 and hence cannot be an output with regard to Early School leavers output indicator. The Work Group is, however, of the considered opinion that the 10% output target can be reached in 2025 / 2026 with regard to persons who would be 21 years of age. Such a person will enter the Secondary Cycle of education in 2015 / 2016 and his or her journey within the Secondary Cycle of education until he or she completes Year 11 (Form V) in 2019 / 2020 will be fully based on the NCF.

02.2 Implementing the National Curriculum Framework

The NCF constitutes a major change undertaking. The NCF implementation will not only demand pedagogical reform as traditional ways of teaching will now be replaced by a more student centered and inquiry-based approach to learning but also a cultural change process as school leaders, teachers, educators and parents are imbued with a new value system.

One of the major changes that the NCF provokes is that teachers should regard the classes made up of individuals. The implementation of the NCF constitutes a national change programme that will have multiple prongs, competing pressures, numerous stakeholders, inherent tensions, competition for resources, simultaneous activity and sub-initiatives, etc. The level and degree of the complexity of an NCF implementation programme, even if it is phased and incrementally managed, will still be exposed to considerable risk.

The challenges that policy makers will face and will need to overcome are many. They include, though are not limited to, the need to obtain political support, maintaining that support over time as policy priorities change, securing continuity in government financing in the face of shifting policy priorities and times when the economy may be facing difficulties. It also implies support for the rationalisation of resources, adequate and sustained workloads, for a professional approach to teacher education, teaching and school leadership, as well as to the continuous professional development of school leaders and teachers.

Visionary and strong leadership, therefore, at both the political and administrative level are critical for success. Capacity building within the Directorates, Colleges and Schools to secure ownership, championing and stewardship for the NCF implementation programme is key to success.

To manage the change process a NCF Implementation Review Board will be set up. The NCF Implementation Review Board, which will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary for MEDE, will be responsible for (i) establishing strategic focus and direction; (ii) establishing strategic priorities for the NCF implementation; (iii) recommending the NCF implementation budget and relative investments; (iv) resolving implementation obstacles; (v) assure effective communication with all stake holders.

The following presents a high level strategy with regard to the implementation of the NCF.

Table 2 : NCF Implementation Strategy

NCF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY ACTION	WHO	WHEN
Communicate the new NCF to teachers, school leaders, parents, students and other interested stakeholders.	Director General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Prepare a document indicating the roles and responsibilities of key practitioners in the implementation of the NCF as well as the over-arching policies that are required to govern the NCF process.	Director General, DQSE Stakeholders	Upon approval of the NCF
Set up a NCF Implementation Review Board charged with (i) establishing strategic focus and direction; (ii) establishing strategic priorities for the NCF implementation; (iii) recommending the NCF implementation budget and relative investments; (iv) resolving implementation obstacles; (v) assuring effective communication with all stake holders. The Board will be chaired by the Permanent Secretary.	Permanent Secretary, MEDE	Upon approval of NCF
Set up Committee for the Implementation of the Science Strategy	Directors General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Initiate consultations and reach agreement with MUT on how the professional development programme to support the implementation of the NCF is to be delivered.	Permanent Secretary, MEDE Directors General, DQSE, DES and MUT	Upon approval of NCF
Set up a Working Group to address the implications of the NCF for further and higher education. The Working Group will be stewarded by the Chair of the National Commission for Further and Higher Education and will be constituted of key stakeholders.	Permanent Secretary, MEDE NCFHE	Upon approval of NCF
Set up a Learning Outcomes Framework Board responsible for setting up Learning Areas Panels for the designing of the learning outcomes and monitoring of the different learning areas.	Director General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Integrate the recommendations of the language policy committee in the working of the Learning Outcome Framework Board.	Director General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Reorganise the DQSE to reflect core business functions: (i) Curriculum and Assessment; (ii) eLearning; (iii) Quality Assurance; (iv) Research, Reporting and Evaluation	Permanent Secretary, MEDE	Upon approval of NCF
Initiate discussions with the Chair of the Council for the Teaching Profession to determine the role of the Council in the implementation strategy.	Permanent Secretary, MEDE Director General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Set up Working Committees to develop policies on: Inclusion; Parental Involvement; and Assessment.	Director General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Set-up the Panel for the Early Years Cycle of Education to provide guidelines about appropriate programmes leading to the achievement of the Early Years outcomes (K1-Y2).	Director General, DQSE	Upon approval of NCF
Obtain approval of the learning outcomes for KGI to Y2.	Permanent Secretary, MEDE	Q3 2013
Design a Profiling Report that reflects the KGI to Y2 learning outcomes.	Director General, DQSE	Q3 2013
Design the training programmes on the new learning outcomes for the Early Years Cycle.	Panel for Early Years	Q2 2013

NCF IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY ACTION	WHO	WHEN
Deliver the training programme to teachers and school leaders in the Early Years Cycle.	Director General, DQSE	Q3 2013
Develop an Ethics Education Programme.	Director General, DQSE	Q1 2014
The end of Y11 (F5) examinations ought to mirror the structure and content of the Learning Outcomes Framework.	Learning Outcomes Framework Board	Q1 2014
Set up Learning Areas Panels to design Learning Outcomes for the Junior and Secondary Years Cycles (Yr3 – Yr11) including the cross-curricular themes.	Learning Outcomes Framework Board	Upon completion of LOF
Set up Curriculum Panels to begin to design the corresponding learning and assessment programmes for the Junior and Secondary Years Cycles for all Learning Areas and Cross Curricular themes.	DQSE	Upon approval of the Junior and Secondary years learning outcomes
Design the training programmes for Junior and Secondary School Leaders and Educators.	Director General, DQSE	Upon completion of the teaching and assessment programmes
Deliver the training programme to teachers and school leaders in the Junior and Secondary Years Cycles of Education.	Director General, DQSE MUT	Upon completion of the training programmes.
Initiate process to align SEC examinations with the Learning Outcomes Framework.	Learning Outcomes Framework Board Learning Area Panels MATSEC Board	Upon completion of LOF
Regular participation in international studies in order to monitor progress over time.	DQSE	Periodically

The
National Curriculum Framework
2012

Part II

03   Main Tenets of the NCF

In the light of historical developments, existing documentation and challenges faced by the local educational community, this NCF envisages:

- a paradigm shift away from a prescriptive curriculum towards a framework based on learning outcomes which allows for internal flexibility and attractiveness to lifelong learning.

- a move away from stand-alone subjects to learning areas that form the entitlement for all learners.

- diverse pathways to learning so that all learners are equipped with the necessary skills to experience success in their life at school and beyond.

- the continuous development of all practitioners, and ongoing support to enable them to interpret the framework and adapt it to meet the needs of their learners and national development.

- that all stakeholders assume leadership and successfully implement this framework.

This NCF promotes:

- a clear focus on improving the quality of education and raising the level of student achievement.

- a readiness to depart from traditional curriculum structures and practices that may restrict learning.

- the development of vocational subjects as alternative pathways to personal development, lifelong learning and employment.

- flexible learning programmes providing diverse and integrated learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners and which suit the interests and capabilities of individual learners within nationally accepted parameters.

- learning programmes that focus on understanding and emphasise the learning process and the active co-construction of meaning rather than the mere acquisition of content.

- learning programmes that empower teachers to implement innovative teaching / learning strategies especially through the use of eLearning.

- a higher quality in the learning programmes and in the pedagogy with the scope of attracting learners to lifelong learning.

- a move away from an exclusively subject-based approach that favours fragmentation and compartmentalisation of knowledge to a more cross-curricular, thematic, inter-disciplinary and collaborative approach that reflects real life situations and encourages transfer of skills from one learning area to another.

- assessment that values and assesses both the processes and the products of learning.

- initial teacher education and further opportunities for training and support in the use of pedagogies that are inclusive in nature and cater for diversity.

- professional development that is congruent with the availability of opportunities within the extended reality of the EU.

- the development of the school as a learning community of reflective practitioners.

- a vision where parents are considered important stakeholders in the educational journey of their children.

03.1   Components of the National Curriculum Framework

The NCF has seven inter-dependent components:

- General Principles
- Aims of Education
- Learning Areas and Cross Curricular Themes
- Effective Learning and Teaching
- Assessment and Evaluation
- Parental and community involvement
- Support Structures.

03.1.1   General Principles

Six **General Principles** form the foundation of the NCF.

Principle 1: Entitlement
Every child is entitled to a quality education experience and therefore all learners need to be supported to develop their potential and achieve personal excellence. For every learner the NCF promotes the development of:

- fundamental values and attitudes.
- a holistic education relevant for life.
- analytical, critical and creative thinking.
- the ability to communicate in the context of bilingualism and multilingualism.
- contemporary learning approaches, including eLearning.
- individual and collective progress, success and achievement.
- smooth transitions within the system and diverse pathways for further learning.
- the support of families and the wider community.

Principle 2: Diversity
The NCF acknowledges Malta's growing cultural diversity, and values the history and traditions of its people. It acknowledges and respects individual differences of age, gender, sexual orientation, beliefs, personal development, socio-cultural background, geographical location and ethnicity. The NCF affirms that all children can learn, grow and experience success by:

- respecting diversity in all its forms.
- promoting an inclusive environment.
- ensuring policies and practices that address the individual and specific needs of the learners and learning community.

Principle 3: Continuum of Achievement
The NCF embraces a developmental approach to education whereby within and across all learning areas and subjects, the curriculum meets the needs of learners according to their stage of development. The NCF promotes:

- curricula for the Early Years, Junior and Secondary school Cycles which are seamless to ensure continuity in the educational paths followed by learners.
- the designing of curricula by the identification of learning outcomes that reflect the different rates of development and achievement within the same age group.
- the reporting on individual progress and achievement in an incremental manner.

Principle 4: Learner-Centred Learning
The NCF promotes the development of a learner-centred approach to learning and teaching which requires:

- active and personalised learning.
- relevant, meaningful and purposeful engagement on the part of the learners.
- negotiation among learners and teachers.
- the development of knowledge, skills and attitudes which promote self directed and lifelong learning.

Principle 5: Quality Assurance
Quality Assurance is to be realised through a system of ongoing self-evaluation, monitoring and review within schools complemented by an external review system that together foster school improvement. The NCF:

- provides direction to Colleges and Schools about key areas of the curriculum.
- facilitates the effective implementation of the curriculum.
- requires and supports high-quality educational leadership at school, college and systems level.
- encourages the adaptation of the curriculum according to the particular contexts and needs in schools and colleges.
- promotes reflective practice, mentoring and professional development for teachers.
- advocates the effective and efficient use of resources within and across schools and colleges.

Principle 6: Teacher Professional Support
The NCF requires that:

- stimulating and supportive environments and resources are available and accessible for all.
- appropriate internal structures are available to provide support to meet the needs of learners, teachers, school administrators, families and other stakeholders in schools and colleges.
- continuous professional development programmes are organised for all practitioners within Colleges and Schools as well as on-going professional development to address national and strategic issues.

03.1.2   Aims of Education

The **Aims** of education in conformity with the Principles outlined above, seek to prepare all children to become lifelong learners, who are confident, successful, creative, connected and engaged in the community and the world around

them and who are able to secure social justice. Their education should enable them to acquire the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that make them capable of sustaining their life chances in the changing world of employment, and to become actively engaged citizens.

Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners

This will require the development of:

• personal and social skills.
• moral and spiritual development.
• literacy, numeracy and digital literacy.
• bilingualism and multilingualism.
• science and technology competence.
• critical and innovative thinking.
• aesthetic appreciation and creative expression.

Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work

This will lead to gainful employment and capacity-building sustained by:

• the ability to communicate effectively and confidently.
• competence in using new information and communication technologies.
• the ability to train, re-train and develop new skills.
• economic stability and independence.
• innovation and entrepreneurship.
• the ability to readily embrace mobility and change.
• a systems view of reality that facilitates engagement in the promotion of sustainable development.
• active involvement in the sustainable development issues.

Learners who are engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities

They will:

• respect diversity and value difference.
• respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage.
• develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts.
• work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice.
• uphold social justice and democratic principles.

03.1.3 Learning Areas and Cross Curricular Themes

Any curricular content must conceptualise learning as occurring through meaningful and challenging experiences, drawing upon learners' prior knowledge, interests and dispositions. Merging various subjects into learning areas contributes to the acquisition of a body of relevant, purposeful and connected knowledge and skills that engage and motivate learners. Rather than eliminate traditional subject content, learning areas promote the establishment of links between and across subjects to reinforce learning.

Discrete learning areas are not proposed for the Early Years, where the emphasis is on the development of skills, knowledge, competencies, values and positive dispositions towards learning which will be developed and extended in later years. Learning areas are introduced in the Junior Years and extended into the Secondary Years, where learners also choose a number of optional subjects according to their interest.

Learning areas ensure that a broad-based and well-balanced curriculum could serve to develop the aims set out by the framework. Learning experiences should serve to develop the important dispositions of active thinkers and learners, namely: "*cooperation, concentration, courage, curiosity, direction, empathy, flexibility, good judgement, humility, imagination, independence, perseverance, an open mind, precision, reflectiveness, responsibility, risk-taking and self-discipline.*" Simister (2007, p. 23).

Comprehensive descriptions of each learning area at Junior and Secondary Years respectively will reflect a Learning Outcomes Framework (LOF) that needs to be agreed upon by the different stakeholders. The LOF will in turn provide the necessary guidance for the programmes of study and assessment to be used in all learning and teaching contexts.

The Early Years
The hallmarks of successful and quality Early Years programmes are those which:

• embrace the socio-cultural dimension surrounding children's learning.
• are concerned with promoting and encouraging positive learning dispositions.
• put children at the centre of the learning environment.
• allow child-initiated activities acknowledging that learning in the early years is a process of co-construction and collaboration.
• promote activities that are related to children's real-life experiences.

- offer children opportunities for hands-on activities.
- draw on a variety of pedagogies which address needs of particular learners.

In the Early Years, emphasis should be given to general competences developed through cross-curricular themes which contribute to establishing the foundations for lifelong learning. During these years, children find out who they are as individuals and position and establish themselves within a society as they interact with others. To achieve both successfully, children learn about and experience ways of using communicative tools necessary for self-fulfilment, personal development and meaningful social engagement.

Success in promoting a love for learning and holistic development comes with suitable pedagogies to incorporate play and experiential, joyful learning. Through programmes which seek children's active involvement and experiential learning, children are expected to acquire social, communicative and intellectual competences in an environment which fosters personal well-being and positive learning dispositions.

These competences can be translated into learning outcomes which young children are expected to achieve by the time they are moving from the early years to the Junior school years. The successful achievement of all the outcomes contributes to the holistic development of children.

Learning Areas for the Junior and Secondary Years
The NCF presents a brief description of each learning area outlining the essential knowledge, competencies, skills, values and attitudes which learners are expected to acquire. Many of the descriptions are adapted from *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework* (2006/962/EC).

Languages
Communication in languages is the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form. This linguistic fluency and competence is expected in both the mother tongue (L1) and the second language (L2), which in the Maltese context generally refer to Maltese and English respectively and to a somewhat lesser extent to foreign language(s). Learning Maltese, English and other languages enables learners to develop an awareness of the nature of language and language learning, of literature and literature learning, as well as widening their personal, social and cultural understanding.

Developing language and literature skills enables children and young people to:

- use questioning, information, critical thinking, decision-making and memory to organise thoughts, ideas, feelings, and knowledge.
- communicate with others and respond to how others communicate.
- formulate, express and present their arguments, feelings and ideas in a persuasive manner.
- appreciate and enjoy the literary heritage of the languages they learn.

Through learning languages and literature, children and young people develop:

- a positive attitude towards communication.
- a disposition towards critical and constructive dialogue.
- an appreciation of aesthetic qualities and a willingness to strive for them.

The learning and teaching of the **second language** (generally English, which is one of the two official languages in Malta), provides access to near-universal knowledge and culture. In addition to Maltese and English as core languages, the introduction to foreign languages through a language awareness programme is deemed necessary in light of the political, geographical and historical context of the Maltese Islands and the EU's emphasis on language learning and multilingualism[11].

The learning and teaching of **foreign languages** at secondary level provides for the acquisition of further communication tools that are useful to appreciate cultural diversity and to facilitate interaction within the European and international contexts. Opportunities for the development of multilingualism, directly related to the world of work, are provided in the Secondary Years. The high competency levels in foreign language teaching and learning developed by young people in Malta during the compulsory schooling which has been confirmed in the results of the *European Survey on Language Competences – 2011* must be sustained in our education system.

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11   The Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001) promoted the need for multilingual capability. Although the imposition of learning too many languages needs to be safeguarded against, children need to be given the opportunity to study at least one other language (L3) in an informal and semi-formal manner during the final Primary years. The current trends in language learning at this level point to an approach that is dialogic and interactive, wherein pupils are exposed to learn the language and the culture through carefully selected language activities.

Mathematics

The ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking in order to solve a range of problems in everyday situations is important for all learners. Through Mathematics, learners acquire a sound knowledge of numbers, measures and structures, basic operations and basic mathematical presentations, an understanding of mathematical terms and concepts, and an awareness of the questions to which mathematics can offer answers.

With increased fluency in Mathematics, young people are provided with opportunities to deepen their mathematical knowledge and reasoning, to come more formally into contact with abstract and logical reasoning, and to better appreciate and apply the communication possibilities that the mathematics medium offers. This Learning Area will include financial literacy aspects such as mathematical and financial understandings in order to ensure that a culture of financial planning and preparation is instilled and nurtured during the Junior and Secondary Cycles of education.

Science and Technology

Competence in science is the ability to use a body of knowledge and methods to explain the natural world, in order to identify questions and draw evidence-based conclusions. Competence in science also involves an understanding of the changes caused by human activity and the responsibility of individual citizens. Through their study of science, learners acquire inquiry and critical thinking skills which enable them to ask appropriate questions, devise methods for answering them, obtain and interpret evidence and communicate the conclusions and reasoning that led to them.

As their understanding of science develops, young people learn to use their observations to explain concepts, principles and theories, and use their skills to elaborate on explanations using appropriate scientific language and techniques such as tables, charts and mathematical methods. They learn to use their imagination to explore creative solutions to the scientific problems they encounter. They also discover how our understanding of scientific theories, principles and information has been built up historically in biological, chemical, physical and environmental contexts. They link science to daily living and the local environment, and develop an interest in ethical issues and a respect for safety and sustainability.

Design and Technology combines practical and technological skills with creative thinking to make useful products. Design and Technology education primarily concerns 'design and make' tasks, where learners work through a creative process. They typically generate, develop and communicate ideas for chosen products; plan how to put their ideas into practice; select appropriate tools, techniques, and materials; explore the qualities of materials; shape and combine materials and components; apply safety procedures; critically examine what they are doing; and on the basis of feedback, plan to improve their work. Their exploration of materials will include Resistant Materials, Electronics and Graphic Products. The 'design and make' process empowers learners, as they progress through the different cycles, to intervene creatively in the manufactured world, manage resources in an entrepreneurial manner and integrate knowledge across domains.

Health and Physical Education

The area of Health Education includes Physical Education and Sport, Personal and Social Development as well as aspects of Home Economics. The learning experiences that take place during health education activities aim at equipping learners with the necessary knowledge, competencies, skill, attitudes, and values which they need to maintain, promote and enhance physical, emotional, psychological and social well-being throughout their school life and as lifelong learners. Educators are encouraged to collaborate with parents and the wider community to ensure meaningful and long-lasting experiences in order to inculcate a deep understanding of 'self', 'other' and the impact of choices and actions upon individuals, communities and the environment. Health Education lays the vital foundation for dispositions necessary for lifelong learning. As they move through the Junior and Secondary years, commitment to social communities and environmental issues also forms part of young people's development.

Religious and Ethics Education

The teaching of religion in schools is seen as an important element in the integral formation of the person. It should lead to a process of self-discovery, developing the moral and spiritual dimensions and contributing towards children's capacity to value, appreciate, perceive and interpret the world they live in. Learning in Religious Education seeks to educate young people regarding the dignity of the human being and the responsibility of each individual towards others for the building of a better society and a better world. Learning in this area nurtures and enhances a sense of spiritual self. Children and young people develop their own identity and understand better their cultural identity. The spiritual dimension of the self should be supported by promoting values that include justice, personal responsibility, respect, reflection and active engagement in moral issues.

In Malta, Religious Education (RE) is currently understood as Catholic Religious Education (CRE). The development of CRE is the responsibility of the Religious Education office of the Maltese Episcopal Conference (Martin de Agar, 2000). CRE throws light on the basic questions about one's relationship with God, the meaning of life, on issues of an ethical nature, on one's personal identity and on the different dimensions of dialogue and social cohesion in a society that is becoming pluralistic like the rest of the European continent. Deeper knowledge of the different religious traditions should provide a valid contribution to the social and civic formation of the young people. CRE leads learners to read, understand, interpret and communicate the Religious Language; connect to, respond to, and express their Spiritual Dimension; comprehend, analyse, and evaluate the Word of God as it finds expression in the Sacred Scriptures and in the Sacred Tradition of the Roman Catholic Church; and engage with and form a Personal Catholic Worldview that enables them to analyse and evaluate personal, local and global issues and apply the Christian message to different situations.

The parents of children and young people have the right to decide that their child does not follow Catholic Religious Education. For young people opting out of Catholic Religious Education, it is recommended that the Religious Education learning area will consist of an Ethical Education programme, which is preferred over a Comparative Religious Education programme. The Education Authorities will be responsible for the development of the programme of study. The delivery of the programme is subject to the ethos of each individual school as well as to logistical considerations.

Education for Democracy
Education for democracy includes Social Studies, Environmental Studies and aspects from Personal, Social Development as well as Home Economics. Through their studies in this area learners acquire skills in enjoying rights and exercising responsibilities in various communities; dealing with conflict and controversy; making informed choices and decisions, and taking action, individually or collectively to promote a just and sustainable society whose policies are based on justice, equity and a respect for the community of life. As they develop their learning in this area, young people learn to employ citizenship skills, showing responsibility towards their environment and their world and understanding the impact of enterprise and industry on the local and global community. They gradually acquire positive attitudes and a respect for human rights; learn to adopt sustainable lifestyles; and develop a sense of belonging within their locality, country, European and international community and a willingness to participate in democratic decision-making at all levels to improve the quality of their lives.

Humanities
Through the study of History and Geography, learners will develop the basic concepts of chronology, empathy, cause and effect, change and continuity. Through active learning and investigative and fact-finding experiences, they gain an understanding of the interrelationships between people, their cultures, contexts and land use. Through exploring and investigating their past and present, they develop observation and recording skills and gain understanding of the importance of collecting evidence. They learn to collate, examine and test data in an attempt to draw simple conclusions from it.

The pedagogy presented for this Learning Area includes:

- fostering an enjoyment of history and developing curiosity about the past which informs understanding of the present.
- developing a sense of identity through learning about the development of Malta, Europe and the world.
- introducing learners to what is involved in understanding and interpreting the past.
- making pupils aware of similarities and differences between life today and in the past and use common words associated with the passing of time to establish a chronology of time.
- simulating discussion of why things happen or change and the results.
- enabling learners to acquire knowledge and understanding of places in Malta, Europe and the world.
- increasing the learner's knowledge of other cultures and, in so doing, teach respect and understanding of what it means to be a positive citizen in a society that has people from different cultures.
- understanding geography information, and developing enquiry and problem solving skills.
- enabling learners to understand environmental problems in Malta, Europe and globally.
- encouraging children and young people to commit to sustainable development.

Visual and Performing Arts
This learning area which includes Art, Music, Dance and Drama provides opportunities for learners to be creative and imaginative, to experience enjoyment and inspiration, and to develop skills in the visual and performing arts. Participation enables learners to experience

and enjoy the energy and excitement of making images and forms, performing and presenting for different audiences and of being part of an audience for others.

Learning in this area involves the development of artistic and creative skills, as well as technical and practical knowledge through the performing and the visual arts and music. Through the particular techniques of each art medium learners develop personal expression and ideas; appreciation and evaluation of both local and foreign art and culture; and communication, performance and interpretation skills. These skills are all transferable to other areas of learning. Appreciating, responding to and actively engaging in creative and imaginative expression supports the development of one's personality. Children learn to explore and appreciate feelings, communicate them through different media, and develop their personal aesthetic dimension.

Children and young people acquire a range of skills necessary for creative expression. In drama and dance they learn communicative and theatrical skills; in music they develop musical ability, appreciation and expression; and through art and design activities they learn to appreciate and construct visual imagery, respond to the feelings they evoke, and make artefacts. They also experience enjoyment and contribute to other people's enjoyment through creative and expressive performance and presentation. Through this area, they develop an understanding of the creative process and the development of aesthetic standards and values, appreciating the visual and performing arts within local and international cultural settings.

Cross-curricular themes

The following cross-curricular themes have been identified as essential for the education of all students and for achieving the aims of education: Literacy, Digital literacy, Learning to Learn and Co-operative Learning, Education for Sustainable Development, Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation, and Education for Diversity,

Literacy

Placing Literacy as the first cross-curricular theme highlights the fact that all learning happens primarily through language in its various forms, and that therefore all educators need to see themselves as guarantors of the language mastery required of their learners in their particular area of knowledge. This implies that literacy competence is not only the concern of the Primary class teacher and the language

teachers in Secondary school but in fact it is the responsibility of all educators. Additionally, the school community as a whole needs to embrace the primacy of literacy competence; this implies the active involvement of parents and the local community amongst others.

Digital Literacy[12]

Digital literacy enhances the teaching and learning processes, the interaction among peers, and interactions between students and teachers. It is driven by the need for increased access to learning which can be facilitated through:

- a shift to constructivist education philosophies,
- a move from teacher to student-centred learning activities,
- accessing both local and global resources,
- making full use of the potential of technologies to enable children to show and create knowledge,
- an increased complexity of tasks and use of multi-modal information.

In digital literacy learners acquire skills in the confident and critical use of Information Society Technology for communication, work and leisure. They acquire basic skills in ICT organised around four major overlapping strands: data sources and manipulation; information communication and presentation; programmed control; and social, ethical and personal aspects. They discover and use digital data sources, and learn to organise, manipulate, interrogate and interpret data. They learn to communicate and present information using multimedia presentations; send emails and attachments; use VOIP and video-conferencing, and chat to collaborate with others. They use collaborative authoring tools and program devices to respond to input using a simplified iconic interface. They also explore social and ethical dimensions of digital technologies and learn to practice netiquette and online safety measures.

Learning to Learn and Co-operative Learning

This cross-curricular theme allows children and young people to learn to effectively manage time and information, identify different learning processes and needs, and seek opportunities to learn and develop skills to learn successfully. In so doing, learners secure the competence to gain, assimilate, process and evaluate new knowledge building on prior learning and life experiences in order to be able to use and apply knowledge and skills in different contexts. This cross-curricular theme supports the fostering of a collaborative environment where learners work together in groups with and without teacher direction.

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12   Although digital literacy is a cross-curricular theme, until ICT is embedded and well-integrated within the learning areas, the NCF allows for a time-tabled ICT lesson.

In this context, learning becomes an active process which allows children and young people to actively engage with peers and in doing so learn several processes such as processing and synthesising information, solving problems and creating products together. Such a context also allows for social development amongst students where they become exposed to diverse viewpoints and personalities and learn to function effectively within group settings which are influenced by the dynamics of the particular individuals involved.

Education for Sustainable Development

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) enables learners to develop the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values required to become active participants, individually and collectively, in decision-making processes, both at local and global levels that will improve the quality of life of present and future generations. ESD promotes a system based approach and an integrated knowledge base that invites learners to develop a holistic view of their surroundings, i.e. an interaction of aesthetic, environmental, economic, political, technological, cultural and societal perspectives. Through ESD, the learner's environment (within and outside the school) becomes a fundamental teaching resource that is locally relevant and culturally sensitive. Learning experiences are structured around the identification and resolution of environmental issues that equip and empower learners with problem solving and decision making skills that are indispensible in the context of lifelong learning. ESD is about learning that:

• re-orients education to address sustainable development.
• respects, values and preserves past achievements.
• values the Earth's resources and its peoples.
• strives towards a world in which all humans have access to sufficient food and water, a healthy and productive life, basic education, and a safer and just environment.
• assesses, cares for and restores the state of our planet.
• develops citizens who exercise their rights and responsibilities locally, nationally and globally. (United Nations, 2004; UNESCO, 2006).

Education for Entrepreneurship, Creativity and Innovation

Entrepreneurship allows children and young people to develop skills for life, enables them to handle uncertainty, respond to change and be creative. Soft entrepreneurial skills include social skills and entrepreneurial attitudes; hard entrepreneurial skills focus more on developing business skills such as drafting a business plan.

Elements of entrepreneurial behaviour (curiosity, autonomy, creativity, initiative and team spirit) are embedded and strengthened through the integration of entrepreneurship programmes, projects and activities in the established curriculum for schools both at primary and secondary level.

Creativity and Innovation are agents for change and contribute to the economic prosperity of society in general and to the well-being of the individual in particular.

A whole-school approach promotes a climate conducive to creativity which constitutes a vital source of flexibility, adaptability and the capacity to innovate. Creativity and Innovation is about developing:

- Affective
- Communication
- Lateral thinking
- Originality
- Emotional development
- Effective communication
- Leadership
- Questioning
- Intuition
- Critical thinking
- Problem-solving
- Fostering entrepreneurial mindsets
- Openness to cultural diversity
- Self-expression

Education for Diversity

Education for Diversity respects the cultural identity of the learner through the provision of culturally appropriate and responsive quality education for all. It provides every learner with the cultural knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to achieve active and full participation in society which enable them to respect, understand and show solidarity among individuals, ethnic, minority, social, cultural and religious groups and nations (UNESC0, 2006).

Education for Diversity promotes an inclusive educational culture and respect for diversity, allowing individuals to function across cultural divides, and offering a platform for children and communities to assert their culture and individuality with confidence.

Education for Diversity challenges various educational processes, such as decision-making within the school, languages of instruction, methodologies used, student interactions and learning resources. It will ensure the inclusion of multiple perspectives and voices within the learning environment, provides spaces for learning about the languages, histories, traditions and cultures of non-dominant groups in a society, encourages team work and cooperative

Figure 03:   The Learning Areas and the Cross-Curricular Themes in the NCF
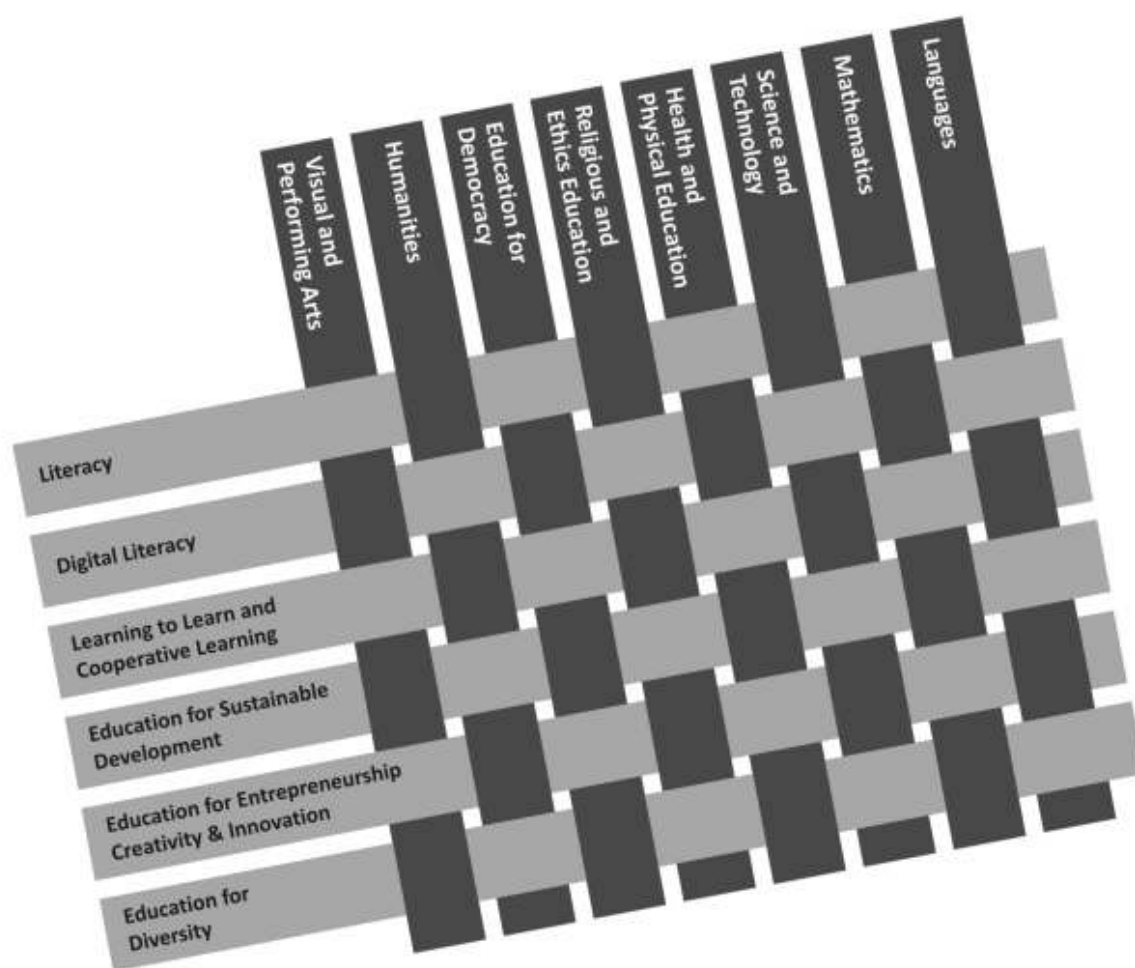
learning in multicultural, multi-ethnic and other diverse contexts, combines traditional and local knowledge and know-how with advanced science and technology, and values the practice of multilingualism. In doing so it encourages an understanding of global issues and the need for living together with different cultures and values.

Curriculum planning should take into account cross-curricular themes providing connecting strands interwoven with the learning areas. This gives learning areas coherence, relevance and stability providing a holistic learning experience by highlighting common objectives, content and pedagogies. Integration is effectively achieved through the specific planning choices once the individual curriculum documents are planned for each learning area. Cross-curricular themes should, where possible, permeate every facet of the curriculum through a whole-school approach.

03.1.4   Effective Learning and Teaching

Learning processes and effective pedagogies
Current theories of learning are based on the constructivist perspective which combines cognitive and social constructivist approaches for effective learning and teaching. A principal feature of constructivist learning is that it is an active process during which individual learners construct meaning. It is most effective when learners are actively engaged in authentic, contextualised tasks. Social constructivism holds that learning is enhanced through co-operative and collaborative learning which promotes the development of critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Teaching is most effective when learners are provided with opportunities to make sense of new knowledge in a context which allows them to interact with the teacher and other learners to discuss and negotiate their understanding. In this view, a teacher-dominated pedagogy, which relegates learners to a passive role, emphasizes memorisation and limits interactions between learners, is not recommended.

Learning programmes need to be competence-based as well as knowledge-based, emphasising the process of learning as well as the acquisition of content, particularly in the context of a society where knowledge is readily accessible. In terms of curriculum design this could be achieved by considering three dimensions:

- **Content and mastery** which involves having students explore and understand the whole breadth of ideas in a particular content area.
- **Higher order thinking** which involves analysis, synthesis and evaluation of content and concepts in some depth, and applying them in different ways and in different contexts.
- Use of **overarching concepts and themes** to examine curriculum content through different lenses, for example change, systems, power, patterns and/or cause and effect.

Effective learning takes place when the teacher:

- elicits the learners' prior knowledge, builds on it or modifies it, and guides learners to an understanding of new knowledge.
- offers support to learners by scaffolding, that is, by using appropriate strategies to help individual learners progress.
- promotes deep learning by emphasising understanding and application of knowledge instead of surface learning with its emphasis on memory and recall of information.
- supports learners to become independent problem-solvers.
- organizes group tasks which help learners exchange ideas, co-construct knowledge and work collaboratively.
- uses a variety of learning experiences to provide learners with opportunities to practise and apply their skills.
- provides timely feedback to learners based on a range of relevant evidence, that learners can then use themselves to improve their learning and increase their understanding.

Learning environments
Since children develop holistically and because learning and development do not occur in a sequential, linear fashion, Early Years educators and Primary and Secondary teachers are encouraged to set up learning environments which appeal to children's interests, are relevant to their day-to-day experiences and can be explored in innovative and challenging ways. Direct, hands-on experiences encourage interaction, engagement and involvement which in turn lead to improved understanding, recall and the development of mental representations. This approach supports children and young people as they move from concrete, tangible experiences to symbolic and abstract notions. As children develop their learning, dynamic learning environments provide a context for dealing with issues in depth and from multiple perspectives.

Progression and differentiation in learning
The principles of diversity and inclusion which underpin the NCF imply that at all stages learners of all aptitudes and competences should experience success, challenge, and the necessary support to sustain their effort. They need flexible learning programmes providing diverse learning experiences that cater for a wide spectrum of learners and allow for different rates of progression as children and young people work through their school years.

Different approaches are needed to address different learning needs. With the focus increasingly on the learner, and with more mixed-ability classes in schools, differentiated approaches are becoming more important and teachers need to adopt strategies that build on children's and young people's previous learning and help them progress.

Transitions
In the Early Years, the curriculum directly builds on children as individuals and as learners, promoting a genuine interest in learning by appealing to young learners' interests and needs. In the Junior Years the curriculum builds upon the foundations laid during the early years, yet it also links closely with the secondary years to ensure smooth transitions. In the Junior Years as well as in the Secondary years subjects are reorganised into learning areas and the progression of levels of achievement expressed as learning outcomes.

The NCF states that:

- the transition from the early years to the junior cycle should be a seamless change facilitated by the strong learning dispositions which children are expected to have developed.
- the transition from primary to secondary school should be smooth and offer progression in a way which supports learners as they learn to take more responsibility for their own learning.
- learning in the secondary years should consolidate and build on the learning experiences of primary education and prepare learners for the wider challenges they will have to face beyond compulsory education.
- The NCF seeks to redress the absence of a vocational education component in compulsory education by incorporating

it within the secondary curriculum rather than as a separate route in the education system and providing recognised certification at the end of the process which facilitates the transition to different options in post-secondary education.

Issues related to the language of instruction
The NCF recognises the need for clear direction on the language of instruction and assessment as part of a revamped National Language Policy[13]. Such a policy is a complex matter which needs to address:

- *entitlement issues* –students need to become proficient in Maltese and English and preferably in another language for their full social, cultural and economic integration.
- *cultural issues* – the rightful place of Maltese as an expression of our national identity; the preference for English as the first language of a minority of our population; the diverse nationalities of students in schools; overcoming prejudices or perceptions related to other languages and cultures.
- *implementation issues* – the use of language/s in different learning areas; language of assessment; the 1999 NMC recommendation that schools develop their own language policy according to their own needs.
- *professional issues* – teachers who are proficient in both English and Maltese; the development of resources in Maltese and in English as necessary; the development of Maltese for specific purposes; the need to heighten interest in and access resources for other languages.
- *economic issues* – the need to have proficiency in English for competitiveness in a globalised economic environment; the importance of foreign languages for the fostering of international relations.

Diversity of students
The NCF embraces diversity and requires that this is promoted through an inclusive environment. The NCF addresses the needs of:
- gifted and talented learners for whom the process of learning needs to be sufficiently challenging to engage and motivate them to develop their talents.
- learners with special educational needs[14] for whom the curriculum should be written in a way that allows the teachers to appreciate how every student can access the same curriculum in every learning area and

allows for the assessment of a continuum of ability.
- learners with severe disabilities for whom the curriculum should offer an education based on a continuum of abilities expressed in terms of developmental phases.
- learners from disadvantaged social backgrounds for whom the school, in collaboration with key local and institutional stakeholders in the community, needs to up-skill and support families and the local community to provide an environment that is educationally rich and stable.
- learners from diverse social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds including children of refugees and asylum seekers for whom the curriculum should include access to an educational programme which is embedded within an emotionally and psychologically supportive environment that respects their individual circumstances.

The development of a national inclusion policy is necessary. It is to be developed by the Directorates of Education with other stakeholders in order to ensure that it is truly embedded in all educational processes and outcomes within the NCF, in all schools.

The NCF recognises that a high quality education requires a supportive infrastructure that provides the conditions and opportunities for all learners to achieve their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively. This infrastructure requires on-going support for teachers, including professional development, student services and human resources.

03.1.5   Assessment and Evaluation

Assessment
Assessment in the Early, Junior and Secondary Years cycles makes an essential contribution to learning and progress at all levels. It is an integral part of the learning and teaching process, providing students and their parents with continuous, timely and qualitative feedback about children's progress, giving teachers' information about their practice, and providing schools and colleges with information about their curriculum planning, learning and teaching. Assessment *for* learning (assessment for formative purposes) is a process carried out as learning is taking place. Learners and their teachers use the outcomes to find what learners know and are able to do in relation to

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13   A Ministerial working group has been set uo and is already working on this policy.
14   The reference to special educational needs here refers to the internationally recognised 18% of the school population who at some time in their school career may have a temporary or permanent barrier to their learning

learning. Assessment *of* learning (assessment for summative purposes) is carried out at the end of a unit, mid-year or at the end of the year. In subjects which are taught as modules, assessment of learning will take place at the end of a module. Information and judgments about learning are pulled together in a summary form for purposes of reporting to parents and sharing information with other teachers in the next class or school. If learners are fully aware of what is expected of them (the learning intentions) and the success criteria against which their learning will be evaluated, they will then develop the self-evaluation skills which will help them become self-directed learners.

Well-designed and appropriately implemented, classroom assessment processes can:

- support learners to use self-assessment to gauge their learning, identify their strengths, their learning needs and their next steps.
- encourage learners to support one another's learning through peer assessment.
- help teachers to understand children's learning better, use evidence to monitor learners' progress, reflect on their practice and adapt or match their teaching to their learners' needs.
- help teachers plan for the learning of individuals and groups and ensure that all children receive appropriate attention.
- support parents to share their children's learning experiences, interpret assessment information and follow their children's educational development.
- promote the reporting on individual progress and achievement in an incremental manner.

Colleges and schools are required to develop an assessment policy. The policy should seek to address the quantity and quality of assessment practices as well as reporting to parents and other stakeholders

Evaluation: Quality Assurance Mechanisms
Schools are expected to constantly develop their capacity to be communities of reflexive practice through:

- the process of school development planning that has inbuilt mechanisms for self-evaluation.
- Mentoring.
- a performance appraisal system that incorporates features of accountability and professional development.
- external reviews carried out by the Quality Assurance Department within the

Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education.

To constantly develop their capacity to be communities of reflexive practice, schools need to:

- plan purposefully for learning and teaching according to shared beliefs, criteria and targets.
- implement these plans critically and flexibly.
- set standards based on the assessment and review of practice and improvement.
- review their own planning and the school's development planning according to this feedback, keeping in mind the possibility of reviewing their shared beliefs, criteria and targets.

In the evolving model of quality assurance, schools continue to be supported in their capacity to develop and implement School Development Plans (SDP) that have inbuilt mechanisms for self-evaluation. This self-evaluation component focuses on the extent to which projected actions have been carried out and the extent to which planned improvements have been achieved. The SDP builds upon progress to date and incorporates other priorities and realities that must be addressed in their school.

Evaluation: Benchmarking and National Monitoring of Achievement
It is the responsibility of the Directorate for Quality and Standards to evaluate curriculum implementation, innovation and emerging trends, through assessment at school, national and international levels.

The NCF recognises the need for a benchmarking and monitoring system that gauges the performance of the education system across the three Cycles of education. This will allow the Directorate for Quality and Standards together with other stakeholders to have the necessary data that will enable the quality assurance of practices in schools. In total, five stages are to be introduced in the system: three for benchmarking and two for monitoring.

Benchmarking: At the end of the Early Years' Cycle and at the end of the Junior Years Cycle as well as at the end of the Secondary School Cycle. Assessments will be on an individual level at the juncture between Years 2 and 3, and at the end of Year 6. These benchmarking exercises will be compulsory for State Schools while Church and Independent schools will be invited to participate. At the end of Year 11, the SEC examination

results will continue to have a benchmarking function as well.

National Monitoring: In order to evaluate the standards of the different learning areas on a national level, the NCF recognises the need to introduce periodic non-intrusive external monitoring mechanisms at two points (once during the Primary cycle and once during the Secondary cycle), which involves samples of schools and students in the three sectors and a specified number of learning areas per year over a cycle of five years.

03.1.6 Parental[15] and community involvement

Formal educational structures should be sensitive and responsive to the realities and opportunities of the learners' environment. Additionally the community (parents, businesses/industries, local councils) – within which learners interact – should acknowledge its crucial role of investing in and promoting a high quality education.

Schools and Parents
Parental interaction with schooling is one of the most important factors for learners' successful educational development (Desmond & Elfert, 2008; UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning, 2008).

Home-School Links, *Parental Participation and Involvement* as well as *Parental Lifelong Learning* are different entry-points for parents who are encouraged to consider more and more diverse forms of parental interaction with schools. The different categories are important for parents, their children and schools to ensure the most holistic educational development of all the stakeholders concerned.

The development of a national policy is necessary. It is to be developed by the Directorates of Education with other stakeholders in order to formalise the different forms of participation and strengthen parents' active involvement in their own and their children's educational development.

Schools and the Community
The relationship between the schools and the community has four dimensions:

- the local community is a useful resource for the school to contextualise learning.
- the school should be a locus for lifelong learning for the community.

- The community can assist schools to prepare learners for the world of work.
- schools respond to societal demands through specific curricular foci and ad hoc educational experiences. Debate within civil society suggests the need for education in specific content areas to bring about a particular culture change in contexts that are in urgent need of improvement.

In effect, the NCF recommends that:

- Schools strengthen ties with the various members, groups and agencies within the community as this will help extend learning within the community and bring learning into the school(s).
- Colleges establish stronger partnerships with the business sector and explore different forms of engagement that can be of benefit to students and educators alike.

03.1.7 Support Structures

A high quality education requires a supportive infrastructure that provides the conditions and opportunities for all learners to develop their full potential and for teachers and administrators to implement the curriculum effectively. This infrastructure requires on-going student services, human resources, professional development opportunities, mentoring and support for teachers as well as strong educational leadership.

Student services
The commitment in favour of diversity and inclusion promoted by the NCF requires the availability and accessibility of additional services in the students' interests. These services range along a continuum from the personal/pastoral to the curricular. Underlying principles must govern the delivery of services to ensure that all services:

- are inclusive in nature and address the particular needs of individual learners.
- start from the reality of the learner incorporating a personal/pastoral component.
- address the implications of the particular service on the learner's educational entitlement and development.
- are provided in the context of diversity, thus addressing the learner's current/ actual level of competence with a view to subsequent progress and achievement.

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15   Throughout this document any reference to parental involvement in education includes legal guardians and significant adults recognised as having a parenting role in the life of the child. This definition is without prejudice to the legal obligations of schools.

- facilitate teachers' access to appropriate information, skills and complementary provision enabling them to address a learner's educational entitlement effectively.
- are effective to the extent that where temporary withdrawal is necessary, reintegration of the learner into the mainstream class is possible.

On-going professional development

The ongoing professional development of teachers to update their knowledge and skills-base is viewed as indispensable for the continued effectiveness of the profession. Teachers need to consider themselves as critical and reflective professionals who are supported to engage with contemporary theory and practice in order to update and improve their pedagogies.

Mentoring

Mentoring supports professionals at various stages of their career. Newly qualified teachers and others facing new roles, challenges and responsibilities benefit greatly from structured support by more experienced and specifically trained peers. Mentoring is also beneficial when a practitioner is experiencing challenges that require professional support. The mentor's principal role is to help an individual to reflect purposefully on his/her professional practice in order to improve it.

Legal and psycho-social services for teachers

The NCF reinforces current structures of support such as the psycho-social and legal services that have been introduced in the state sector and the pastoral care teams that support teachers in the psycho-social sphere in the non-state sector.

Leadership of key practitioners

The NCF encourages a leadership model that promotes distributed forms of leadership. In such a context, whilst school leaders play both a visionary and strategic role, they also need to focus on developing a collaborative culture which draws upon the full range of professional skills and expertise to be found among the members of the organisation. Varied opportunities are to be created within the college network system and in the other sectors to allow College Principals, School Leaders and practitioners to engage in critical discourse, to address curricular matters and improve the quality of learning and teaching. This model of leadership is applicable in different ways in the Early Years, Primary and Secondary years.

The NCF acknowledges that the quality of educational leadership is critical in setting a climate which is conducive to learning as envisaged in this document. The centrality of key roles such as College Principals and Heads of School requires leaders to demonstrate devotion to core principles and established outcomes whilst being committed to the people responsible towards achieving such outcomes. Set in a backdrop of fast-paced changes, educational leaders ought to embrace approaches that may transform the feelings, attitudes, and beliefs of practitioners and other stakeholders in the field.

The NCF recommends the adaptation of an Educational leadership model that is strongly focused on the primary function of education – the achievement of learning goals by children and young people, in an atmosphere which caters for the total well-being of each individual. Headship within the NCF framework requires a set of skills, attitudes and personal qualities which when present, make a difference in the learning entitlement of every student. Effective Heads of Schools have a personal vision of what it is they would like to achieve in their schools. They should know how to articulate that vision, and how to encourage and motivate teachers and parents as well as children, to own that vision and to share in the responsibilities of making it come about. Within a primary framework, the Head of School should respond effectively to the personal and social needs of the learners and thus we envisage Heads of Schools to be people oriented, encouraging trust and openness by being dynamic with colleagues.

The NCF recognises that the underlying moral dimension should be the driving force for all educational leaders. When moral authority drives leadership practice, the systems, college or school leader becomes a leader of leaders developing and pursuing a vision and ideas built upon common core values. Hence leadership is seen as no longer the exclusivity of designated roles but becomes a distributed process which shifts the focus away from the traditional role of the few heroic leaders to that of a concerted action where members synchronise their actions, achieving an amount of energy greater than the sum of the individual actions. Distributed leadership encourages the involvement of stakeholders in collective or delegated decision-making process. Ethically such collegiality is the way forward merging accountability with collaboration.

Educational Leadership envisages also the role of teachers as Educational Leaders and Curriculum Managers, according to their specific roles. Teachers are the most directly responsible for the implementation of the Curriculum within the classroom and their professionalism ought to be empowered by their use of resources in order to develop meaningful curricular experiences that connect with children's everyday lives. This is precisely where the role of the Head of School comes in to manage change, to lead, to support

and to facilitate the development of the curricular aims and objectives within the school community.

Moreover the NCF encourages educational leaders to transcend the here and now and as system thinkers in action to think global and act local. Fundamentally, the leadership being contemplated creates a paradigm shift of relational boundaries, enhancing strategic planning and capacity building measures towards the sustainable achievement of individual, organisational and system goals. In congruence with such vision, Senior Management Teams should be supported to dedicate effective, quality time to work together in a school setup as they lead the schools, critically reflect upon issues concerning learning and teaching and engage with teachers and other support staff in order to enhance the quality of education being provided.

Conclusion

The seven components of the NCF cannot be considered in isolation. Each component has a distinct and unique contribution towards the development and implementation of a seamless curriculum and a coherent framework which spans learners' experiences from the early years through to the end of secondary school.

03.2 The Early Years
(KG 1 – Year 2)

The Early Years refer to the period in a child's life which spans from birth through to the age of seven or eight[16]. The Early Years are the most crucial phase in each individual's life - a child's learning and education in the Early Years are inextricably linked to the holistic development which occurs through informal and formal settings, planned and spontaneous activities, structured and unstructured events. The extent of the learning experienced by each child is in part determined by a supportive environment.

The NCF endorses the position recommended by the 1999 NMC[17] which:

regards the first two years of primary schooling as a continuation of the two-year Kindergarten period. This entails that the teachers adopt a pedagogy that develops knowledge, attitudes and skills which derive from concrete experiences. The 3-7 year period, considered as the pre-conceptual phase, must be regarded as the formative period which precedes the one during which the school experience becomes more formal. (p. 57)

In effect, the NCF confirms that the Early Years cycle extends from KG1 – Year 2. The Early Years are important for several reasons, including:

• the overall, holistic development, learning and understanding which occurs during these years must be recognised and used as the foundation towards learning and development, whether children are being cared for at home by parents and other familiar care-givers, Early Years settings outside the home, or during the transition phase between non-compulsory and compulsory education.

• the curricular demands in the Junior years and secondary school years can be successfully achieved following the establishment of firm foundations in the Early Years where children are given opportunities to develop their self and their identity as a result of positive experiences and relationships with their immediate and eventually, the extended world around them.

The Early Years are characterised by a period of rapid growth and change. Thus, a curriculum framework which purports to address learning outcomes gains relevance and significance when it advocates in favour of:

• broad outcomes which are all-encompassing and not exclusively focused on academic achievement.
• pedagogical approaches which respect children's age and developmental level.
• unlimited content which is to be presented to children in ways which engage their attention and secure their direct involvement and participation.
• highly-trained and skilled staff who are sensitive to the characteristics of young learners and in tune with the learning processes of toddlers, infants and young children in the early stages of formal schooling.

03.2.1   Purposes and general objectives

Within the Early Years' experiences, young children develop knowledge, skills, competences, attitudes and values which enable them to become successful learners and active participants in society. Successful learning experiences are characterised by approaches which:

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16   (Wilks, Nyland, Chancellor & Elliot, 2008, Department of Education & Early Childhood Development & VCAA, 2009, Waddell & McBride, 2008
17   http://www.curriculum.gov.mt/docs/nmc_english.pdf

- respond to children's interests and prior knowledge.
- respect young learners' cognitive maturity and preferred learning patterns.
- stimulate curiosity.
- instil an interest for learning.
- promote exploration, discovery and creativity.
- foster environments which promote communication and interactive styles of learning.

Powerful learning experiences contribute to the development of children who become involved in pursuing their interests, are motivated, develop perseverance and learn to assume responsibility. Such outcomes are realised through an environment of trust and respect, which gives learners self-confidence and self-esteem in their abilities.

The NCF requires that the Early Years:

- be supported by the visionary leadership of key practitioners working in early childhood education.
- recognise children's uniqueness in learning and development through a variety of learning styles and pedagogies.
- offer programmes of activities which move away from emphasising specific subject or content teaching in favour of pedagogies which enhance curricular links and thus facilitate learning processes.
- endorse policies for assessment and transitions.
- facilitate capacity building of major stakeholders, predominantly parents and staff.
- incorporate measures to ensure quality assurance procedures thus promoting a reflective approach which monitors and evaluates practices and outcomes.

Leadership of key practitioners
Practitioners in early childhood education, whether directly responsible for designing and developing a programme of activities or having an administrative role must be highly-trained and qualified staff. They must be skilled in supporting and extending children's communication skills and creative in designing an appealing environment which will arouse and stimulate children's thinking and interactions. Staff must be observant and reflective in order to adapt and modify activities based on cues and feedback proffered by children themselves. Practitioners must capitalise on the social dimension through interacting frequently and directly with children in their care thus facilitating a sense of well-being. Practitioners must be responsive to children's learning interests. They must be highly skilled and competent as a result of the strong theoretical foundations which direct and support their professional and pedagogical decisions. Practitioners need:

- a sound theoretical base to understand how young children learn and develop.
- pedagogical knowledge to determine what is reasonable to do with young learners and the most effective ways to achieve this, therefore applying theory to practice.
- personal and practical knowledge about a range of professional issues which impact directly on the management of and relationships amongst a group of learners.
- research skills which enable them to understand on-going development in their field and critically position themselves when faced with results.
- a genuine interest in listening to and responding to children to promote a pedagogy of respect, responsiveness and reciprocal relationships.
- reflective skills which allow them to think critically through their work with children, question their perceptions and understandings of children's experiences and examine their interactions with children with a view to improving the quality of the Early Years experiences.

Apart from being knowledgeable about child-development, learning processes and suitable pedagogies, early childhood practitioners must demonstrate empathy and solidarity with the families of children with whom they are working and show that they are capable of working with children and their families.

Learning Processes and Effective Pedagogies
In early years, children learn through observation, experimentation, trial and error, exposure to stimulating environments and highly contextualised settings which facilitate their understanding of the world around them. There is significant linguistic and cognitive development; physical and moral development as well as personal, social and emotional development. Indeed, children develop holistically, and progress in any one area influences other areas.

Every child has the right to develop to his/her maximum potential. The foundations for realising this potential are laid down in the Early Years. Practitioners need to capitalise on activities, events, resources which are of particular interest to a child or group of children to stimulate their interest, thereby develop motivation which in turn supports perseverance in these young learners as they gain confidence and self-esteem.

Young children's prior knowledge and understanding informs them as they try to make sense of what something is by using previously-acquired information- but they learn by modifying existing knowledge and amending their understanding with new information they are exposed to. Learning occurs when new knowledge and information is internalised and modifies previous understandings.

Early childhood educators should plan for a programme of activities which appeals to different cognitive styles. Children thrive on multi-sensory approaches: their understanding of the world improves; the likelihood of understanding how things work, drawing conclusions to hypotheses, culminating in understanding cause and effect, and learning how to discriminate and differentiate between contrasting objects increases.

Learning environments

Early Years practitioners are encouraged to set up learning environments which appeal to children's interests, are relevant to the common day experiences children are likely to have and which can be explored in an exciting manner. Direct, hands-on experiences encourage interaction, engagement and involvement which in turn lead to improved understanding, recall and the development of mental representations. This supports children in their move from concrete, tangible experiences to symbolic and abstract notions.

Well-planned learning environments offer the possibility of in-depth, thorough and detailed observations, analysis, investigations, exploration and experimentation. Multiple perspectives can be investigated through projects, topics and themes which respond to children's curiosity and need to find out the what, why and how things work.

The setting up of interactive learning environments promote a range of skills, attitudes, knowledge and values which young children can acquire. Yet, a hallmark of good Early Years practice is the recognition and promotion of child-initiated activity and enquiry. Such activity should be encouraged as it acknowledges learning as an on-going process where all involved make valid contributions. A quality programme should strike a balance between adult-led and child-initiated activities that emerge directly from children's interests.

Assessment

Assessment in early childhood education is a means of finding out what children are interested in as well as finding ways of recording and documenting their progress and development. Assessment in the Early Years Cycle has multiple functions[18], namely to:

- understand children's learning better.
- start discussions about children's learning.
- share information with others in the early childhood setting.
- reflect on practice.
- plan for the learning of individuals and groups.
- ensure that all children receive attention.
- highlight the learning that is valued in the setting.
- involve children in self-assessment.
- discuss the programme with the family.
- share experiences with family.

Assessment in Early Years is as important for the children as it is for the adults, especially for practitioners. Assessment based on careful observation and a responsive and reflective attitude informs practices. Recording children's achievements helps adults capture the learning processes as well as the outcomes. In addition, assessment measures need to be undertaken at the end of the early years cycle to ensure that where necessary, children who are identified as requiring additional individual attention can be provided with the appropriate support through well-planned activities during the Junior Cycle.

Transitions

During the Early Years, children go through several inevitable transition phases which must be acknowledged and supported to ascertain that they gain a positive and self-confident attitude towards change, growth and development. The changes which young children face need not be insurmountable difficulties, nor should they be unpredictable and unsupported events.

Whilst certain procedures ought to be established and initiatives taken to minimise the impact which transitions can bring about, the variety of early childhood settings where children spend their time should ensure that children encounter opportunities which allow them to develop their identity and establish themselves whilst embracing the complex nature of a gradually widening world. With regard to the implementation of the NCF, one of the most significant transitions which young children are expected to experience relates to the change from the non-compulsory years in child-care and kindergarten centres to compulsory education in the year when they turn five. The Early Years cycle now includes these years in one cycle with the aim of making this transition as seamless as possible. Children then go through another transition from Year 2 to Year 3 when then move to the Junior Years cycle.

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18   Carr (2001)

Parental involvement

The role of parents as partners in the education process is important throughout the different cycles, especially during the Early Years. The influence of the home on children's personal achievements cannot be negated and the effects of home are tangible at a very early age. Parents and the Early Years settings need to support each other through a range of facilities which allow easy communication and sharing of essential information. By having settings where the information is easily accessible as well as personnel who are readily available, parents and educators join forces in helping children develop into confident learners who can become active in their own learning. The NCF accentuates the role of parents in encouraging the child's development at home and in the community as well.

Quality Assurance

In order to ensure that an Early Years programme is of high quality, there need to be opportunities for self-evaluation, critical reflection and enquiry. These can be achieved through collaborative practice where examples of good practice are recorded and shared; where staff within an Early Years setting meets to discuss, review and consider events, approaches and pedagogies; where staff discuss their knowledge, observe others and share their reflections and considerations.

In fostering a culture where evaluation and reflection become routine, practitioners are supported in making necessary amendments to current practices and applying a range of strategies and techniques which improve the learning outcomes for a wider number of children.

Since the NCF is promoting a developmental approach during this cycle, which necessitates a child-centred approach, it is important that the appropriateness of pedagogies and activities adopted for this cycle are evaluated in order to identify where further professional support is required.

Learning Outcomes for the Early Years

In the Early Years emphasis should be given to general competences developed through cross-curricular themes which contribute to establishing the foundations for lifelong learning. The Early Years are comparable to a journey of discovery where children find out who they are as individuals and position and establish themselves within a society as they interact with others. To achieve both successfully, children learn about and experience ways of using communicative tools necessary for self-fulfilment, personal development and meaningful social engagement.

Children's active involvement and experiential learning promote social, communicative and intellectual competences and contribute to fostering personal well-being and positive learning dispositions.

Well-being

A safe environment which offers children security is one where there is stability and consistency. Such environments support children in building their self-esteem, developing a positive self-identity and gaining confidence in themselves and their achievements. Within a safe environment where they are accepted, given freedom of choice, and allowed to explore and experiment on their own and with others, children learn to become risk-takers. They can develop individual strategies which help them to cope with new challenges, become autonomous, self-regulating and self-determining individuals who make progress, overcome difficulties and feel satisfied with their endeavours. Hence, young learners become independent.

As they become independent and learn to take care of themselves, young children learn how to deal with their feelings, recognise and label emotions, accept themselves and learn to be comfortable with themselves and others. In developing socio-emotional competences, young children acquire self-discipline as they learn to be more in control of who they are and what they can do. In addition to their affective development, in the Early Years children learn about who they are and what they can do through physical activities which can be used to promote a healthy life.

Social competences

In the Early Years, children increasingly gain awareness of others and learn how to live and grow with others. Children experience and deal with turn-taking and sharing activities, ideas, thinking processes and achievements that help them develop positive and authentic relationships. In so doing, children learn what it means to respect others, value each other and develop a sense of community. Together, children have to resolve conflicts as a result of their learning to contribute and participate in a democracy. Empathy development occurs when children can understand the emotions which others are experiencing and see different perspectives.

As they develop social competences in an atmosphere where their personal well-being is safeguarded, young children develop a moral identity; a sense of right and wrong as they distinguish between what is acceptable or unacceptable; as they experience and adopt values depending on how they are treated and how they see others being treated.

Communicative competences

Several communication tools are available to help children understand themselves and others. The predominant tool which facilitates communication is language. As children engage with and gain experiences in using both oral and printed language, their abilities to think, understand, express themselves and extend social relations are strengthened. The overall objectives of language in the Early Years should predominantly focus on helping children increase their awareness of the functions and purposes of language skills[19] which make them a versatile tool for any member in a society. Where language learning is concerned, from a young age children gain flexibility and control over language through correct and appropriate choice of words; by extending their vocabulary; learning how to assert themselves and becoming aware of the subtle influence which language has on society. Listening, speaking, reading and writing are tools which are used constantly in order for different purposes and functions.

Whilst respecting, promoting and strengthening the child's first language, young children growing up in the Maltese context begin their journey of second language learning. This is a direct reflection of the wider society rather than necessarily being an immediate need young children have. However, it is imperative that children are exposed to the two official languages of the country in meaningful ways which would serve to promote learning and understanding of the world which goes beyond language learning itself. Second-language teaching can be successful if lessons are learnt from mother tongue acquisition and the pedagogies used in the more formal school settings should be driven by principles which are appropriate for the age group.

In addition to language, from a relatively young age, children are exposed to alternative sources of communication access which has been greatly facilitated with the widespread availability of digital technologies. Growing up in the 21st century, children require digital competences which enable them to communicate more effectively not only with their immediate contacts but even with others. Availability of and accessibility to different information sources enables children to engage with and make sense of the world around them; encourages them towards communication and collaboration; promote skills for conducting research as well as locating, storing and retrieving information.

Learning dispositions

A child-centred environment is one which encourages children to find things out for themselves allowing for experimentation, hypotheses testing, and trial and error. Through hands-on approaches in pursuit of answers to self-initiated activities, young children develop perseverance and concentration. The role of adults is to be sensitive to young learners' interests and inclinations and to provide stimulating environments which challenge the minds of learners in their quest for information, allowing for inquiry-based activities and independent exploration, which enable them to remember and understand what and how certain results are achieved. Learning by doing is a more effective methodology than learning by telling. Children need to enjoy learning and have a real sense that they are increasingly more than capable of learning and achieving.

Intellectual competences

The Early Years experiences offer children possibilities to engage with and understand the world around them. Every effort must be made to ensure that activities, environments and resources are challenging and that children are given the possibility of tapping into diverse sources of information. Early Years settings are responsible for helping children become aware of skills and strategies necessary to access, look for, elicit, retrieve, organise and understand information. Equipped with appropriate strategies and a healthy approach to risk-taking, children acquire a range of cognitive skills such as identifying, labelling, sorting, grouping, sequencing, classifying, categorising, and matching.

These competences can be translated into learning outcomes which young children are expected to achieve by the time they are moving from the Early Years to the Junior Years cycle. The holistic development of children contributes to successful achievement of all the outcomes.

> **EARLY YEARS OUTCOME 1: Children who develop a strong sense of identity**
> - Children who develop in a safe, secure environment which they can trust and where they feel comfortable to express themselves.
> - Children who have a sense of independence and autonomy.
> - Children who are responsible and resilient in the face of challenges.

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19   Language skills' refers to listening, speaking, reading and writing. 'Language skills' is the term broadly used to refer to receptive and production skills.

EARLY YEARS OUTCOME 2: Children who have a positive self-image
- Children who believe in themselves fully aware of their potential and capabilities.
- Children who have confidence in themselves and their achievements.
- Children who have positive attitudes which enable them to take the initiative and become risk-takers.

EARLY YEARS OUTCOME 3: Children who are socially adept
- Children who are capable of establishing relationships with others.
- Children who have empathy, respect and acceptance of different points of view.
- Children who have an awareness of the notions of fairness, a sense of justice and non-preferential treatment.
- Children who collaborate with peers and adults with diverse backgrounds and needs.

EARLY YEARS OUTCOME 4: Children who are effective communicators
- Children who are capable of using different forms of and media for communication.
- Children who interact and engage with varieties of text and printed material increasing their awareness of purposes/functions.
- Children who are familiar with symbols and patterns and their use.
- Children who are aware of different language systems, notably L1 and L2.
- Children who engage with digital literacy as a means of retrieving data as well as representing and communicating ideas.
- Children who are versatile with the use of numbers, data handling, shapes and measurement and print in context as a means of production of knowledge and information as well as meaning making and comprehension.

EARLY YEARS OUTCOME 5: Children who nurture positive attitudes towards learning and become engaged and confident learners
- Children who have a range of cognitive skills including labelling/identifying, recognition, sorting, hypothesising, predicting, comparing, sequencing, grouping.
- Children who have positive dispositions including enthusiasm and motivation, curiosity, questioning, concentration, perseverance, imagination, ability to accept alternative suggestions/criticism.
- Children who have the motivation to broaden their knowledge and reinforce their understanding through availability of and access to various sources of information.

03.3 The Junior Years (Years 3-6)

03.3.1   Introduction

During this cycle, children continue to be entitled to a stimulating, happy, safe and caring educational environment which builds on early childhood experiences, promotes the development of their full potential in all aspects of learning and paves the way for capacity-building and life-long learning which will be strengthened at the secondary level. The challenge that lies ahead is to ensure that the Junior School curriculum allows for the implementation of pedagogies founded on a socio-constructivist approach which respects individualised learning patterns and encourages co-operative learning, addresses all children's needs and reduces the over-emphasis on the pass or fail mentality brought about by an examinations-oriented system.

Education at the Junior Years aims at:

- supporting children in their journey of discovering the joy of learning.
- strengthening children's holistic development.
- enabling children to acquire knowledge, concepts, skills, values and attitudes which will allow them to develop into lifelong learners able to progress at their individual pace of development.

The educational settings and experiences during the Junior years aim at enhancing children's learning capacity. This is achieved through the planning, implementation and evaluation of educational activities that develop children's ability to acquire, comprehend and apply knowledge, develop and practise a wide variety of skills and key competences and internalize positive attitudes and values. Specific programmes of studies and assessment modes are to be clear, valid and relevant.

The Junior Years curriculum assists children to develop into learners who are:

- confident, have a positive self-image, high self-esteem and are capable of nurturing healthy socio-emotional relationships.
- critical and innovative thinkers who are capable of generating creative ideas and putting them into practice.
- proficient users of Maltese and English.
- numerate and have a firm foundation in mathematical reasoning and concepts.
- scientifically literate and capable of engaging in enquiry that inculcates the love of exploration and wonder.

- capable of implementing the approach of design and make in their environment.
- digitally literate, capable of using and adapting to new technologies.
- physically active, capable of making choices in favour of a healthy life-style.

03.3.2   Aims of the Junior Years Cycle

The NCF aims at developing:

A.   Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners

This leads to the development of:

Personal and social skills
Children's intrapersonal and communication skills are developed to bring about positive self-esteem, self-confidence and self-awareness. A totally integrated approach across the curriculum enhances these skills within the affective domain in order to develop the children's capacity to build solid relationships with self, peers and adults.

Moral and spiritual development
The development of the moral, spiritual, and religious dimensions contributes towards the children's capacity to value, appreciate, perceive and interpret the world they live in. It aims at initiating the children into a profound and life-long search for truth and the value of life and existence through a Catholic perspective. An ethical education programme will be made available as an alternative to denominational religious education programmes. The delivery of this programme is subject to the ethos of each individual school as well as logistical considerations.

Literacy, numeracy, and digital literacy
Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy are the foundations for further learning. Through programmes which build upon the initial skills inculcated during the Early Years, children become proficient in speaking, listening, reading and writing in both Maltese and English. Mathematical concepts and language are inculcated through systematic teaching and learning activities to help children develop numeracy and problem-solving skills. Progression is achieved through thinking, manipulating, reporting and presenting results. Digital literacy is developed together with literacy and numeracy through children's engagement with different technologies.

Bilingualism and multilingualism
In addition to the simultaneous development of Maltese and English, in the later years of the Junior Years cycle, children are encouraged to experience a foreign language awareness programme. The learning of two languages other than the mother tongue from an early age is linked to the development of multilingualism. (Barcelona Conclusions, 2002).

Science and technology competence
Problem-solving and enquiry skills are inculcated through practical work and through exploration of ideas. The skills of investigation, designing and making, testing and reporting are to be given importance.

Critical and innovative thinking
During the Junior Years children's imagination and inquisitiveness are drawn upon in order to investigate problems and explore possible solutions. They are introduced to different experiences, media and materials which allow them to develop their own ideas and experiment with alternative ways of problem-solving. They learn to focus on systematic ways in which to address problems; collect, test and analyze information and apply results to solve problems in different situations.

Aesthetic appreciation and creative expression
Through Arts Education, children appreciate, respond to, participate in and explore creative performance and expression.

B.   Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work

Although children are far-removed from the world of work in the Junior Years, the foundation skills and attitudes for employability are to be nurtured from an early age. Such skills and attitudes develop through:

The ability to communicate effectively and confidently
Communication skills in verbal, non-verbal, written, visual, physical, technical and emotional/expressive fields are to be developed to prepare children to respond and interact with situations as they occur.

Competence in using new information and communication technologies
Emphasis is given to the acquisition of basic ICT skills including issues related to safety and use. Digital Literacy encourages learners to discover and use digital data sources, create digital multimedia presentations and use collaborative authoring tools. Learners are able to program devices to respond to input using a simplified iconic interface. They are also able to send emails and attachments, use VOIP and video-conferencing, and chat to collaborate with others. They will learn and practice netiquette and online safety measures.

The ability to train, re-train and develop new skills

Appropriate learning and teaching strategies enable children to be receptive to their own strengths and limitations providing them with an ability to improve and adapt intelligently to changing realities and contexts.

Economic stability and independence

Children learn to take initiative and to become independent thinkers and participants in team-work. Their initial understanding of the value of co-operative and collaborative work is further strengthened at the Junior level. Through their experiences, children become aware of the vital contribution of each member in society towards the good of the community. Learning to be flexible, tenacious and resilient, paves the way for responsible citizenship.

Innovation and entrepreneurship

Children value the processes that lead to creating and implementing new ideas. Through risk-taking, planning, perseverance and the use of their imagination, children understand and develop the ability to think, create and value new products that help them and others adapt to changes in society. Attaining self-belief and the ability to be useful and productive for one's self, one's group of friends, class and school inculcate the right attitudes necessary for the eventual contribution towards the common good.

The ability to readily embrace mobility and exchange

School exchanges with students from other colleges, sectors, towns, countries allow for and encourage mobility. Such activities prepare children for the social, cultural, and economic changes that they will experience during their lifetime. Multilingualism and awareness of different cultures and lifestyles broaden children's understanding and appreciation of diversity.

A systems view of reality that facilitates their engagement in the promotion of sustainable development

From a young age, children can appreciate and value empathy and with appropriate support develop curiosity, enthusiasm and good judgment. With the aid of inquiry-based learning, children learn to understand that all actions may have long-lasting effects on communities and societies.

Be actively involved in sustainable development issues

Responsible citizenship results in active citizenship. Children build a sense of community through the inculcation of value and belief systems most prevalent in their school and home. Through their experiences, including those of a cross-curricular nature, children become aware of a range of plausible solutions and take action to improve their immediate environment. They also become aware of national and regional issues and develop informed opinions about them.

C. Learners who are engaged citizens who secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities

These learners need to:

Respect diversity and value difference

Children discover similarities and differences around them through their engagement with different cultures and languages. In this way they begin to understand and value diversity.

Respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage

During the Junior years, children need to experience their cultural and national heritage and wealth. Through visits, exhibitions and other first-hand opportunities children study and explore their country's past and present. Inquiry-based learning, the viewing of artefacts *in situ* as well as the study of documents and texts enable pupils to form a solid understanding of who they are and where they come from. Children can actively engage in projects that assist in the conservation of their regional and national heritage. Student mobility and twinning projects with European and other foreign schools are encouraged and should come part of every student's experiences.

Develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts

Children strengthen their ability to appreciate social, cultural, national and geographical realities by learning historical and geographical knowledge and developing attitudes and skills which promote intercultural understanding. The Mediterranean and European dimensions are of particular interest for children at this level. Participation in twinning and mobility projects in the EU such as e-Twinning and Comenius projects among schools at local and at international levels facilitate intercultural experiences.

Work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice

Appreciating diversity and difference, whilst concentrating upon similarities, promotes tolerance and the ability to recognize ways in which a community can work towards a more socially-cohesive society. At a class, year and school level, children engage in collaborative learning strategies that promote practices which are socially-inclusive.

Uphold social justice and democratic principles
Children learn about social justice and democracy with an understanding of one's rights and responsibilities as they actively engage in discussions, debates and governance practices. Cross-curricular links are also advocated for the development and achievement of this crucial objective.

Learning Areas
The learning areas are set out in a way which ensures that a broad-based and well-balanced curriculum is formulated in order to address and achieve the aims outlined above. Effective pedagogies are included in the development of the learning areas below.

Languages
Languages encourage children to develop:
- Listening, speaking, reading, writing, and presentation skills.
- Abilities to organise thoughts, ideas, feelings, and knowledge; communicate with others and respond to how others communicate.
- As competent users of both Maltese and English, who are able to appreciate and enjoy the literary heritage of both languages.
- Intellectual skills which allow learners to explore and effectively use questioning, information, critical thinking, decision-making and memory.
- An awareness of foreign languages with the aim of becoming open to other languages and cultures with a positive disposition towards mobility and new experiences.

Whilst Maltese and English are core languages of the learning area, a language awareness course is being proposed in the later years of the Junior Years Cycle. A school-based decision as to which foreign language / s should be introduced is being advocated[20].

Speaking, listening, responding to various texts (written, visual, oral and aural) and communication skills are given importance through a wide range of authentic experiences drawing upon various resources including situations and events, printed materials, literary texts and digital technologies.

For English and Maltese, assessment is carried out in the four language skills (listening, speaking, reading and writing) taking into consideration the wide range of levels of achievement. At the end of the Junior Cycle, the four skills in English and Maltese will continue to be assessed in the national end-of-Primary benchmark introduced in 2011.

Mathematics
The learning that takes place within the area of Mathematics allows children to develop:
- Essential numeracy skills which support them in daily life.
- Key numeric competences that include the understanding of concepts, principles, and applications.
- Creative approaches in the four strands, namely, use of number, measurement, space and shapes and data handling.
- Logical thought and engagement with investigative processes that lead to solutions.
- Application of mathematical concepts on matters relating to financial decisions and planning.

All children need to experience mathematics as a rewarding and enjoyable experience. This can best be achieved by using a combination of different teaching styles and through differentiated teaching taking into consideration different learning styles.

In addition to continuous assessment in each of the four strands, an end-of-year examination in the later years of the Junior Cycle is recommended. At the end of the Junior years, the national end-of-Primary benchmark will continue to include the mental/oral paper as well as a written paper in Mathematics to ensure that the range of important skills are given their importance during this cycle.

Science and Technology
In the Junior Years cycle, the purpose should be to create awareness and develop a sense of wonder about the world while introducing simple scientific concepts and vocabulary. Science programmes in the Junior Years encourage children to:

- develop an inquiry-based approach to finding out facts by observing, exploring and investigating their environment.
- communicate their findings orally, pictorially and in writing.
- learn how science works, and how information has been discovered through biological, chemical, physical and environmental contexts.

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20 The Common European Framework (Council of Europe 2001) promoted the need for multilingual capability. Although the imposition of learning too many languages needs to be safeguarded against, children must be given the opportunity to be introduced to at least one other language (L3) in an informal manner during the later years of the Junior Cycle. The current trends in language learning at this level recommend an approach that is dialogic and interactive, wherein pupils are exposed to the language and the culture through carefully selected language activities.

Science can be learnt through play and other enjoyable hands-on activities, with an emphasis on observation and communication of experiences. Children can be encouraged to engage with science through simple investigations which allow them to question; to use multimedia and locate appropriate information; and to use storytelling and drama to link science to daily living and the local environment in which they live.

Assessment of student success should take place alongside learning and involve situated problem-solving activities. It should be formative in nature and based not only on individual achievement but include group and self-assessment. This encourages the learners to develop a sense of themselves as "young scientists" within their class community. Learning outcomes can be captured and reported through various forms of recording such as investigations, learning logbooks and portfolios. The assessment should be a narrative account or "learning story" which documents the skills and processes of science as they are experienced by the learner.

Design and Technology encourages learners to:

- generate, develop and communicate ideas for products that are needed.
- learn to plan what to do next.
- select tools, techniques, and materials.
- explore the sensory qualities of materials.
- measure, mark out, cut, shape and combine materials and components.
- learn about safe procedures; and critically examine what they are doing and try to improve it.

Assessment for Design and Technology is ongoing, often feedback is immediate as materials, tools, products and programs respond to what the children are doing. Assessment is mostly formative and a record of tasks/portfolio made can be kept.

Religious and Ethical Education
During the Junior Years, Religious Education challenges children to move beyond knowledge. It should be a process of self-discovery, a discovery of their own uniqueness, in the context of a community that is rich in experiences. Thus classroom practices encourage exploration, investigation and meaning-making. The use of multimedia resources, stories, creative arts, discussions and hand-on activities are to be used to stimulate and encourage meaning-making.
Assessment should be mainly formative rather than summative. Assessment is to be integrated with the whole process of learning to make sure that children have achieved what they are entitled to according to the identified learning outcomes.

Teachers are encouraged to use various tasks, including practical projects, comprehension, discussion and presentations, to assess and evaluate different levels of the cognitive and affective domains of learning.
Parents of learners have the right to decide that their child does not follow CRE. For such students, the NCF recommends an Ethics Education programme drawn up by the Education Authorities. Delivery of such a programme depends on logistical considerations as stated earlier.

Humanities
Humanities Education consists of History and Geography. The learning of History contributes to the development of the students' sense of identity as Maltese citizens as well as citizens of Europe and members of a wider global community. The learning of Geography enables learners to develop spatial understanding of the local, regional and global environment as well as physical, economic and political interactions within and between communities.

During the Junior Years, the Humanities encourage children to:

- begin to understand the interrelationships between people, their cultures, contexts and land use.
- explore and investigate their immediate past and present, thus beginning to understand the importance of collecting evidence.
- cevelop observation and recording skills.
- collate, examine and test data in an attempt to draw simple conclusions from it.
- develop the basic concepts of chronology, empathy, cause and effect, change and continuity.
- engage in the study of geographical, environmental and social concepts.

Through investigative and fact-finding experiences, observation, fieldwork and recording skills will be developed and used extensively.

Education for Democracy
During the Junior Years cycle, children are introduced to democratic values that are related to respect of fundamental freedoms, human rights and responsibilities as well as diversity, active participation and dealing with change.

Children learn about social justice and democracy with an understanding of one's rights and responsibilities as they are actively engaged in discussions, debates and governance practices. In addition, cross-curricular links as well as activities such as understanding of the functions of a school council are advocated for the development of these crucial values and

skills. During this cycle, children also develop skills that explore their responsibility towards their environment and their world and the impact of enterprise and industry on their life and their world. Assessment for learning procedures is to be employed in this learning area.

Visual and Performing Arts

The Visual and Performing Arts encourage young learners to:

- enjoy being creative and imaginative by being engaged in various art forms.
- acquire skills necessary for creative expression through:
- communicative and theatrical skills in drama and dance;
- musical ability, appreciation and expression in music; and
- the appreciation and construction of visual imagery, responding to the feelings they evoke, and making artefacts during art.
- develop important skills, both those specific to the Arts and those which are transferable.
- begin to appreciate the Arts within the local and in international cultural settings.
- begin to develop an understanding of the creative process and the development of aesthetic standards and values.
- experience enjoyment and contribute to other people's enjoyment through creative and expressive performance and presentation.

A thematic and integrated approach will draw all the above concepts and skills into various relevant learning experiences.

Assessment procedures include the recording and reporting of expressive and performing skills in the various art forms.

Health and Physical Education

This learning area encourages learners to:

- actively and enthusiastically participate in activities to develop important physical skills in an enjoyable way.
- learn the skills and rules of collaborative play, sportsmanship, leadership and competitiveness.
- participate in teamwork and develop team spirit.
- begin to appreciate the importance of a healthy body and physical well-being.
- become aware of and appreciate the changes that take place physically as they grow.
- experience activities that encourage social interaction, promote self-awareness, reflective behaviour, decision-making processes and consequential thinking to

develop the necessary skills of emotional and social intelligence.
- begin to become aware of the importance of a healthy mind and body.
- understand the importance of nutrition and eating in a healthy way.
- discover their strengths and weaknesses.
- learn to understand and manage both positive and negative feelings.
- develop the important dispositions of active thinkers and learners especially during key transitions.

Assessment procedures will ensure that the children's development in this area of learning is suitably recorded and used to inform further teaching and learning strategies.

Leadership of key practitioners

The NCF encourages a leadership model that promotes distributed forms of leadership. In the Junior years, school leaders within the senior management team (SMT) have both a visionary and strategic role. School leaders also need to focus on developing a collaborative culture which draws upon the range of professional skills and capabilities found among the different members of their school.

Being skilled in areas which have a direct impact on the students' achievements necessitates keeping abreast with the times and seeking regular training. School leaders and practitioners in the Junior cycle need to share a reflective approach towards teaching and learning with the aim of finding ways to motivate children through diverse pedagogies which respond to their educational needs. In line with this philosophy of continuous training through reflective practice, the NCF recommends staff improvement through ongoing professional development that values and promotes a learning community,

School leaders and teachers in the Junior Years need to be:

- curriculum managers who are pedagogically strong within a context of diversity.
- capable of making curricular and pedagogical choices which promote high quality teaching and learning congruent with learner-centred pedagogies and learning-centred approaches.
- resourceful in supporting and ensuring the sustainability of initiatives.
- capable of addressing opportunities and challenges as they arise.
- effective communicators and strong believers that schools are learning communities.
- directly involved in curriculum development and innovations at a national level.

Assessment

During the Junior Years, assessment methods that support learning, evaluate each child's performance, reflect on practice, plan for further learning of individuals and groups of pupils, and allow for consistent recording and reporting on each child's overall performance continue to be regarded as valid. Assessment accumulated over the year takes into account the children's overall progress and development against a learning outcomes framework. This information helps the teacher obtain a better understanding of the children's performance and maps out needs in order to plan appropriately. This information can also be shared within the school and with parents. Such assessment is also important for school administrators as it provides information about the school's achievement in helping pupils reach the national levels of achievement.

The necessary support throughout the junior years will be provided for children experiencing learning difficulties in literacy, numeracy and digital literacy in order to ensure the mastery of these core competences by the end of the Junior Years.

From Years 3 to 6 the NCF recommends school-based assessment, incorporating the assessment of oral/aural skills in Maltese and English. The assessment process provides parents, teachers and the school administration with an overview of each child's development in terms of levels of achievement. In the State sector the process becomes more formalised with the introduction of examinations in conjunction with other forms of assessment in Year 4. In future, this practice may be reviewed in favour of alternative forms of assessment.

In non-state schools, different practices exist with regard to examination practices. The NCF recommends that during the Junior Years Cycle, children should experience annual examinations at least once prior to the end of the cycle. The participation in the national end of Primary benchmark in Mathematics, Maltese and English in Year 6 is compulsory for children attending State schools while schools in the Church and Independent sectors will continue to be invited to participate. The information is used to record the achievement of pupils at the end of the Junior Years and thus provide important information about the learning of individual pupils especially for receiving secondary schools.

A more comprehensive picture of achievement in the different learning areas of the curriculum at national level is obtained by means of a system of external monitoring of a sample of areas in a representative sample of schools 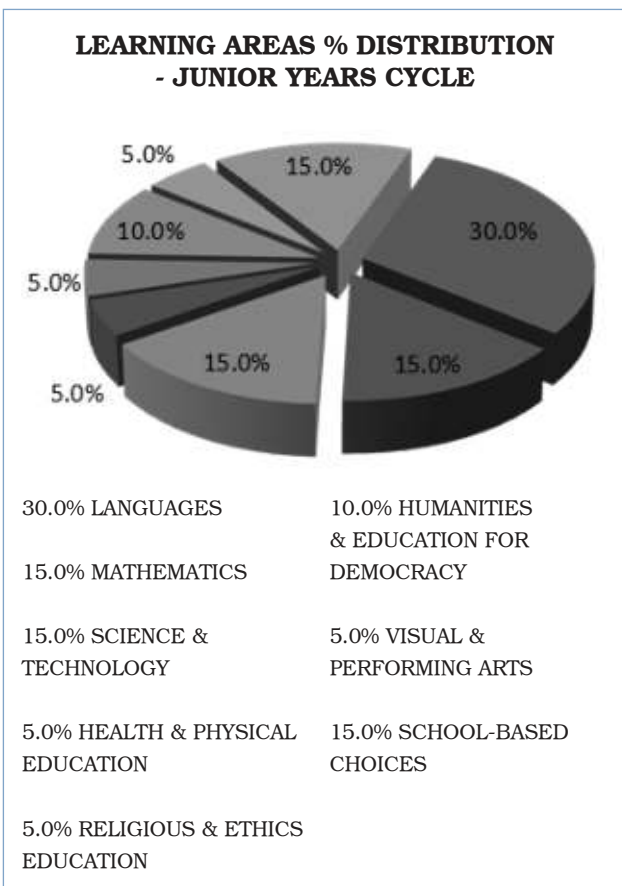over a cycle of years yet to be determined. Such monitoring would serve two purposes: to get a snapshot of learners' general levels of achievement in particular areas and to assess the implementation of the curriculum itself with a view to recommend improvements and further support.

Entitlement

The table overleaf shows the percentage minimum entitlement for the different learning areas being established for state schools. During the Junior Years, it is recommended that 60% of the time is dedicated to Maltese and English, Mathematics, Science and Technology. During this cycle, school-based decisions make up 15% of the curricular time available for learning and teaching. These percentage minimum entitlement figures for the different learning areas are being established for State Schools while Church and Independent Schools are invited to consider their adoption within their schools.

Transitions

During the Junior Years, the curriculum builds upon the foundations laid during the Early Years on the one end, and it also links closely with the Secondary years on the other end to ensure a smooth transition. The Junior Years support a seamless curriculum which ensures that the learning areas and the pedagogies address the learners' holistic development. In addition, assessment is used primarily to inform learners, teachers, parents and the school about each individual child's progress and achievement.

LEARNING AREAS % DISTRIBUTION - JUNIOR YEARS CYCLE

30.0% LANGUAGES

15.0% MATHEMATICS

15.0% SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

5.0% HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

5.0% RELIGIOUS & ETHICS EDUCATION

10.0% HUMANITIES & EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

5.0% VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

15.0% SCHOOL-BASED CHOICES

LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE JUNIOR YEARS CYCLE
Outcome 1: Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners.
Children who are confident and able to establish effective relationships with other children and with adults, leading to positive self esteem, self confidence and self awareness.
Children who are able to value, appreciate and interact with their immediate environment.
Children who competently use the range of age-appropriate language skills in both Maltese and English.
Children who are able to recognise and value the importance of foreign language for communication purposes.
Children who are able to apply basic numeracy and problem solving skills.
Children who are able to engage confidently with basic levels of technology.
Children who are able to demonstrate a positive disposition towards investigation, designing and making, testing and reporting at elementary levels.
Children who are able to express their own ideas and experiment with different ways of solving problems.
Children who are able to appreciate, respond to, participate in and experiment with basic creative performances and expression.
Outcome 2: Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work
Children who are able to communicate with confidence utilising various communication skills and media.
Children who are able to apply basic ICT skills whilst observing netiquette and online safety measures.
Children who are able to learn and to adapt to changes.
Children who are able to adapt to an environment of geographic change.
Children who are able to take the initiative and are capable of working independently and collaboratively.
Children who are able to create and to experiment with the basics of entrepreneurship.
Children who are able to use curiosity for positive judgment.
Children who appreciate their environment and act positively in favour of sustainability.
Outcome 3: Learners who are engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities
Children who view diversity as a cohesive force rather than a dividing force.
Children who appreciate and promote their Maltese culture and heritage.
Children who appreciate their Mediterranean, European and global contexts.
Children who value and respect difference whilst recognising similarities.
Children who develop an awareness of their rights and responsibilities as active citizens.
Children who adopt a healthy and active lifestyle, conscious of the long-lasting implications.

03.4 The Secondary Years (Years 7 – 11)[21]

03.4.1   Introduction

The transition from primary to secondary school should be smooth and offer progression in a way which supports children as they learn to take more responsibility as young people. The secondary years are an important period for their personal development and learners should strive for certification in order to have access to further and higher education. By the end of secondary education, learners are entitled to certification which includes the Secondary School Certificate and Profile documenting their formal, informal, and non-formal learning, the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) and VET qualifications or alternatives, all of which are recognised by Malta Qualifications Council (MQC).

The Secondary Education Cycle is an important milestone in the educational journey of learners as it consolidates and builds upon the learning experiences of the Junior Years and prepares learners for the wider challenges they will face beyond compulsory schooling. Education at this level should:

- provide learners with a period of adjustment allowing them to familiarise themselves with the procedures of secondary education and an opportunity to address any unresolved issues (re knowledge and skills) related to the Primary years.
- expose learners to a wider perspective of knowledge and wisdom that goes beyond their experiences in the Primary years.
- ensure that learners deepen their understanding and aptitude in specific learning areas.
- equip learners with the required skills, competences, attitudes and values necessary to adapt to a society characterised by change and to function successfully in their immediate community and beyond.
- promote the development of the whole person by helping learners deal with growing up physically (issues related to health, puberty and sexuality), psychologically (issues related to mental development and health and management of stress), emotionally (issues related to positive and negative feelings); socially (issues related to interpersonal skills, peer pressure and conflict resolution) and spiritually (issues related to ethics and values).
- provide learners with experiences, competences and understanding that prepare them for lifelong learning and empower them to make wise choices for their future.
- prepare learners for certification and qualifications that are necessary in order to gain access to further and higher education and employment.

03.4.2   Aims for Secondary Education

The NCF aims at developing:

A.   Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong learners

This requires the development of:

Personal and social skills
Personal and social skills are developed at this level to ensure that students complete the five-year cycle equipped to handle an ever-changing social reality. The fundamental values of family, respect, inclusion, social justice, solidarity, democracy, commitment, care, love and responsibility are strengthened during the Secondary years of education.

Moral and spiritual development
The secondary school experience helps students to strengthen and enhance their moral and spiritual development. Through formal learning, individual, group or classroom experiences, through personal evaluation with the help of religious counsellors and teachers, students develop the various skills that lead to moral and spiritual growth including a more critical, mature and informed outlook on Christian beliefs and practices. Students should also accept, understand and carry out dialogue with those who profess a different faith.

Literacy, numeracy and digital literacy
These skills are generally acquired at the primary level. At the secondary level these skills are further developed for all learners as part of their entitlement in the different Learning Areas.

Bilingualism and multilingualism
Being multilingual implies being able to communicate in speech and in writing in at least three languages. In addition to the further development of Maltese and English, at the secondary level, students formally start learning a third language with the possibility of studying a fourth language as well. Foreign language learning is a strength in our local system which needs to be sustained.

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21   In line with the philosophy of a seamless curriculum, it is recommended that the primary and secondary cycles within compulsory education are referred to as Years 1 to 11.

Science and technology competence
Having scientific competence implies an inquiry-based approach to learning. Students develop curiosity concerning natural phenomena leading them to question what they see and feel. During the Secondary years, students deepen their knowledge and understanding of scientific and technological processes. The aim is to prepare them for a society where science and technology have a leading role.

Critical and innovative thinking
During their Secondary years, students develop the skill of exploring a particular issue from various perspectives and are able to assess the veracity of sources of information. Students are expected to be creative and innovative and experiment with alternative ways of problem-solving.

Aesthetic appreciation and creative expression
Aesthetic appreciation and creative expression is enhanced through the study of art, music, dance, drama and literature. Learning in the expressive arts provides opportunities to underpin and enrich learning in other curriculum areas.

B.   Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work

This requires:

The ability to communicate effectively and confidently
Learners are expected to develop an understanding of Maltese and English and gain confidence in their use in a variety of contexts including the different learning areas and everyday life situations.

Competence in using new information and communication technologies
Learners strengthen the use of a variety of digital technologies to tap into and share information resources; to assess their reliability and critically analyse the information obtained. This competence is necessary for self-expression, the presentation of their work and for communicating with different communities

The ability to train, re-train and develop new skills
Learners become capable of constructive self-evaluation and appreciate the need for lifelong learning within the context of a changing society; be capable of identifying and possibly anticipating emergent needs in society; identifying organisations that offer training opportunities and be flexible in adapting to new technologies and ensuing skills.

Economic stability and independence
Learners need to understand how to use personal, national and global resources in order to maximise their economic value, provide stability and autonomy. They need to develop a socially responsible economic ethic that prioritises measures which promote the common good.

Innovation and entrepreneurship
Learners are equipped to anticipate, initiate and deal with change; develop organisational skills that lead towards individual and collaborative ventures; and develop and be proficient in the skills required for group dynamics, risk assessment and conflict resolution.

The ability to readily embrace mobility and exchange
Learners need to be prepared to respond and be flexible to the emergent needs of the work force; be able to evaluate local and foreign resources required for personal development; be flexible to adapt plans to include travelling abroad to train and/or specialise in a particular field of expertise; appreciate the value of cross fertilisation of ideas, methods, techniques and approaches; appreciate and be willing to share local expertise with other social contexts.

A systems view of reality that facilitates their engagement in the promotion of sustainable development
Through exposure to interdisciplinary themes, learners appreciate that reality is the sum effect of various component realities; develop skills to identify and acknowledge the complexities and interrelatedness of personal, social, cultural, religious, political, economic, technological and environmental concerns in any collective endeavour; be sensitive to the needs of other members of society, particularly the marginalised and disadvantaged individuals or groups; develop a realisation of the impact of personal decisions and actions at the local level on community and global levels and vice versa; approach problem solving by looking for links and promoting partnerships and synergies on the basis of dialogue, negotiation and conflict resolution to arrive at win-win situations.

Active involvement in sustainable development issues
Learners become committed towards the improvement of the quality of life at a personal, communal, national and global level; develop critical thinking and reflection skills to evaluate current policies/practices/lifestyles and suggest alternative sustainable behaviours; recognise the personal – not just the authorities' – responsibility towards the adoption of sustainable development and develop into empowered citizens who are active participants in decision making.

C. **Learners who are engaged citizens who secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities**

They need to:

Respect diversity and value difference
This aim is primarily reached through the inclusive policy of schools. The inclusive school does not only cater for the student irrespective of gender, religion, race, ability and beliefs, but has as one of its aims the promotion of the potential of each student through individualised attention and support. The school ethos and practices, especially at the Secondary years, transmit this value to all students. Besides being achieved specifically through particular learning areas, this aim is also developed through education for democracy and education for sustainable development.

Respect and promote Maltese culture and heritage
Different learning areas provide students with opportunities to experience our national culture and heritage to appreciate and strengthen their national identity. A good programme of complementary curricular activities including cultural visits and projects would support formal class teaching in the achievement of this aim. Expressive arts (art, music, dance and drama), combined with environmental studies, history, and geography, are to give particular importance to our national identity and to the understanding of Malta's place in Europe and in the world. Pride of place is to be reserved for the acquisition and skilful use of the Maltese language.

Develop intercultural competence and appreciate their heritage within the Mediterranean, European and global contexts
Language education with an emphasis on the wider cultural context is one of the most appropriate tools to develop intercultural competence. Student mobility and twinning projects with European and foreign schools are encouraged and should come part of every student's experiences.

Work towards strengthening social cohesion and ensuring social justice
The NCF links to other reforms in education that seek to promote equality of opportunity and access to a quality education. The emphasis on transition and early intervention is the foundation of a just educational system that strengthens Maltese society and individual students. Promoting respect for diversity and valuing difference build a stable and strong society. Voluntary work schemes, multicultural schools, a strong civic sense and non-discrimination in schools are the seedbed of social cohesion. With the common good in mind, students are taught how to dialogue and reach consensus, if necessary through mediation.

Uphold social justice and democratic principles
Initiatives which embrace democratic practices in schools and an inclusive approach will promote social justice to all. The school administration needs to give commensurate space to the initiatives taken and co-ordinated by the Student Council and needs to consult the Student Council on matters directly affecting student life in school.

Learning Areas
The Learning areas that are introduced in the Primary years are reinforced and extended in the Secondary years. In addition, a number of optional subjects are introduced in the secondary cycle. The following section focuses on the development of the learning areas during the secondary years.

Languages
The teaching and learning of the mother tongue (generally Maltese) at secondary level strengthens the learners' sense of identity and conceptual development. The teaching and learning of the second language (generally English) at secondary level, reinforces the acquisition of an important international language of communication. For both Maltese and English, the exposure to language learning is to be interpreted in the broader sense and thus incorporate both language and literature with at least a minimum of half the lessons being devoted to the development of the different language skills in both English and Maltese. In the case of Maltese, currently language and literature lead to one SEC exam; in English, language and literature lead to two different SEC examinations. It is recommended that the current practice for English SEC examinations is also considered for Maltese.

In addition to the compulsory languages (Maltese and English), learners generally choose one or two foreign languages during their Secondary years which also lead to SEC examinations. This strength in foreign language learning to MQF Level 3 by the end of compulsory education is to be sustained. Students following individual learning programmes may have some adaptation to this entitlement.

Mathematics
Mathematics provides students with the opportunity to deepen mathematical knowledge and reasoning, to come more formally in contact with the abstract and logical reasoning embedded within the subject, and also to better appreciate and apply the communication possibilities that the mathematics medium offers, such as through mathematical modelling. The idea is to consolidate previous achievements while facilitating further

growth that serves the needs and interests of each student.

The core secondary mathematics experience should strive to achieve two main targets:

- Engaging students in the applications of mathematics as tangible realities in daily life (everyday mathematics).
- The preparation and motivation of students for further studies both in the subject itself as well as in other subjects.
- Application of mathematical concepts on matters relating to financial literacy, financial planning and decision making.

Science and Technology

The teaching of science develops scientific thinking and an understanding of higher order concepts, principles and theories in a holistic manner. Ethical, economic, social and moral issues contribute to a deeper understanding of science and its links to everyday life. This dimension helps students to integrate knowledge from different learning areas and understand that science does not have a solution to all problem situations.

All students in Years 7 and 8 study Core Science. In Years 9, 10 and 11, students who wish to specialise in Science and related subjects, can opt for one, two or three of the following: Life Sciences, Physical Sciences and Materials Science leading to a SEC examination in each of these options. For students who do not wish to specialise in Science it is recommended that they study Core Science leading to a SEC examination.

Technology education is provided through Design & Technology (D&T) and includes modules on Resistant Materials, Electronics and Graphic Products. All areas carry common learning outcomes that help the students acquire the knowledge and skills through design, make, evaluation and communication skills.

Religious and Ethics Education

In Malta the teaching of religion in schools is seen as an important element in the integral formation of the person.

Religious Education contributes to the holistic development of students during the secondary cycle by providing the language and the skills to access and express their religious and spiritual dimensions and may challenge them to question the reasonableness of a faith journey in today's social and cultural context. Learning in Religious Education occurs in full respect of the uniqueness of every learner.

Parents have the right to decide that their child does not follow Catholic Religious Education. For such students, an Ethics Education programme will be offered as the alternative. However, delivery of such a programme depends on the ethos of the school as well as on logistical considerations.

Humanities Education

Humanities Education consists of History and Geography. The learning of History contributes to the development of the students' sense of identity as Maltese citizens as well as citizens of Europe and members of a wider global community. The learning of Geography enables learners to develop spatial understanding of the local, regional and global environment as well as physical, economic and political interactions within and between communities. It encourages learners to acquire an understanding of sustainable development and an awareness of the need to protect and conserve the environment for future generations.

Education for Democracy

This learning area brings together Social Studies, Environmental Studies and aspects from Personal, Social Development and Home Economics. Education for Democracy needs to be reinforced by the active participation of students in class, on students' councils, through curricular activities and initiatives that take place within the local community and through national and international projects and other activities that develop entrepreneurial skills.

Visual and Performing Arts Education

During the Secondary cycle, the Visual and Performing Arts continue to provide learners with opportunities to be creative and imaginative, to experience inspiration and enjoyment, and to develop skills in the visual and performing arts. Participation enables learners to experience and enjoy the energy and excitement of making images and forms, performing and presenting for different audiences and of being part of an audience for others. These experiences also help learners with self-expression, communication skills and dealing with different emotions.

Health and Physical Education

At secondary level, Health Education includes Physical Education and Sport (PE), aspects of Home Economics (HE) and Personal, Social Development (PSD). This learning area promotes enjoyment through engagement in physical activity that inculcates a healthy lifestyle as well as a positive disposition towards oneself, others and life. Commitment to social communities and environmental issues also forms part of the students' development at this level.

Option Subjects in the Senior Secondary Years
During the first year of the secondary cycle (Year 7), students generally study one foreign language which may include: Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian and Spanish, according to availability in schools. Schools may consider the inclusion of other languages should this be sustainable and educationally viable. It is also acknowledged that some schools give students the opportunity to study two foreign languages. This practice is supported by the NCF. At the same time, schools may feel the need to design programmes for students who are still experiencing difficulties in the core languages.

During the last three years[22] of the secondary cycle students make further choices in their subject options. In cases of students who are facing difficulties with the core curriculum, schools can advise students to limit their subjects and they have the flexibility to devise an appropriate learning programme for them instead.

The NCF requires that schools offer a range of subjects from amongst the following list, but the inclusion of other subjects is to be encouraged, should this be sustainable and educationally viable.

- Accounts	- History
- Art	- Home Economics
- Business Studies	- Foreign Languages: Arabic / French / German/ Italian / Russian / Spanish
- Computing	- Life Sciences
- Design and	
- Technology	- Materials Science
- Drama	- Music
- Economics	- Physical Education
- Graphical	- Physical Sciences
- Communication	
- Environmental Studies	- Social Studies
- European Studies	- Textiles Studies
- Geography	- Vocational subjects[23]

Vocational Education and Training (VET)
The senior secondary years are supported by a flexible, coherent and diversified curriculum aimed at catering for students' varied interests, needs and abilities.. VET subjects are electives within the senior secondary curriculum. The value of VET subjects is to be conferred by the wider community where the conditions which sustain the trust of the community are also those which assure the quality of these subjects such as: effective stakeholder involvement, a

motivating curriculum, responsive institutions, competent teachers, good careers guidance and student support, and the development of strong linkages to further education and employment.

VET subjects are introduced in the senior secondary curriculum to diversify the learning opportunities available to students. They are intended to enrich the learning experiences of students of varying learning needs and interests, particularly those who benefit most from a strong practical orientation in their learning. This orientation is also applicable to the learning and assessment of the core subjects. These subjects offer studies with stronger elements of practical learning linked to broad professional and vocational fields. Such subjects :

- offer practical contexts and content designed to engage and motivate students who learn more by doing than conceptualising.

- include content that is designed to challenge students and provide options for both academic and career progression.

- adopt an organising structure of areas of studies relevant to broad trends in vocational studies and the world of work in Malta. Each area of studies provides foundation knowledge and concepts necessary for keeping abreast of knowledge and practices in that area.

VET subjects :

- enable students to understand fundamental theories and concepts through application and practice, and to develop their generic skills in authentic contexts; and
- provide students with opportunities to explore their career aspirations and orientation for life-long learning in specific areas.

During their educational journey, students acquire knowledge, skills competencies, attitudes and values across the Learning Areas. They also receive guidance and advice to help them make informed choices among elective subjects, including VET subjects, in their secondary cycle of education. Through the career-related context available in schools, students have the opportunity to become familiar with a variety of professions and occupations. Understanding the knowledge, skills, competencies and workplace requirements within a professional field helps students develop their career aspirations.

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22   This may be two years in some non-state schools
23   Leading to certification (Foreign and Local) recognised on the Malta Qualifications Framework.

VET subjects seek to meet the career-related competencies such as:

- understanding the knowledge, skills, competencies and workplace requirements within a vocational field; and mastering the knowledge, competencies and skills specific to the studies.
- understanding and interpreting workplace requirements through practising the basic skills in an authentic or near authentic environment.
- developing and applying conceptual, practical and reflective skills to demonstrate innovation and entrepreneurship.

Secondary Years Syllabus Development

The re-organisation of the traditional content areas into the eight learning areas at the core of this NCF and the introduction of modular learning are intended to encourage and support transformation in learning programmes. The NCF necessitates a national Learning Outcomes Framework agreed upon by interested stakeholders for the different Learning Areas and for each subject. Learning and teaching programmes, examination syllabi, SEC examinations and alternatives will then be derived from the Learning Outcomes Framework.

This process needs to consider that the NCF advocates for a student-centred and inquiry-based pedagogy integrated with the cross-curricular themes including an eLearning based approach. Another major consideration in the development of learning programmes is the awareness of the actual curriculum time available in a given scholastic year.

Leadership of key practitioners

The leadership role of key practitioners assumes great significance for the changes in curriculum provision to be effect. Educational leaders and teachers in their different roles need to:

- re-examine their perceptions about students' entitlement within an inclusive framework.
- create a vision and inspire others to join in working towards achieving it.
- set clear expectations and realistic goals.
- work collaboratively and collegially with other practitioners.
- put in place school development planning and review processes.
- demonstrate commitment and resilience to implement meaningful change.
- provide for on-going professional development of staff.
- provide for the necessary resources and support and ensure the sustainability of initiatives.
- be curriculum leaders and managers.

The implementation of a developmental model through a differentiated approach

All learners, irrespective of the status of their mastery of core competences and even their physical or intellectual disabilities, are entitled to experience and master all eight learning areas to the highest degree that is possible for them to attain. The way forward is therefore to develop and implement specific learning plans for these students that would include:

- supporting teachers to develop and implement differentiated teaching in their classrooms in terms of both learning processes and outcomes.
- making best use of the possibilities inherent in the learning programmes based on outcomes and an incremental approach to recording progress and achievement.

Assessment

The general principles of assessment outlined earlier in this document apply to the secondary years as well.

At the classroom level, assessment for learning informs learners and classroom teachers about progress and actions that may be needed to improve learning, helping learners to acquire knowledge and develop skills. Teacher assessment is useful in assessing skills and attitudes that cannot readily be assessed through conventional tests and examinations. Evidence of learning may come from written and practical work, project work, field work and other similar practical learning activities.

Assessment of the students' achievement for summative purposes should not be dependent on one-off performances in tests and examinations. There is much to gain from considering information obtained through multiple approaches to assessment carried out over a scholastic year. This leads to a more valid assessment of knowledge, skills and attitudes within the different learning areas.

The NCF recommends the development of an assessment policy at the school and college level for the secondary school years. The policy should also consider students following individual learning programmes who may be assessed using alternative forms of assessment.

At the end of their secondary education, learners are entitled to the Secondary School Certificate and Profile documenting their journey throughout their five year cycle in secondary school. It includes formal, informal and non-formal learning as well as their attendance record and a profile of their personal qualities for each of the five years. This certificate which may be awarded at Level

2 or Level 1 of the MQF according to established criteria is recognised by the Malta Qualifications Council (MQC).

At the end of the secondary cycle, students are expected to sit for the Secondary Education Certificate (SEC) examination of the MATSEC Board which awards certificates that are accredited at Level 3 (Grades 1-5) and Level 2 (Grades 6-7) of the Malta Qualifications Framework (MQF). These qualifications at an individual level may also be used for national benchmarking purposes.

As a quality assurance measure to evaluate the standards of the different learning areas on a national level, the NCF recommends the introduction of periodic non-intrusive external monitoring mechanism at two points (including once during the Secondary cycle), which involves samples of schools and students in the three sectors and a specified number of learning areas per year over a cycle of years yet to be determined.

Entitlement

The table below shows the percentage minimum entitlement for the different learning areas being established for state schools during the lower secondary years and the senior secondary years. This minimum entitlement is worked out on a 37 to 40 lesson we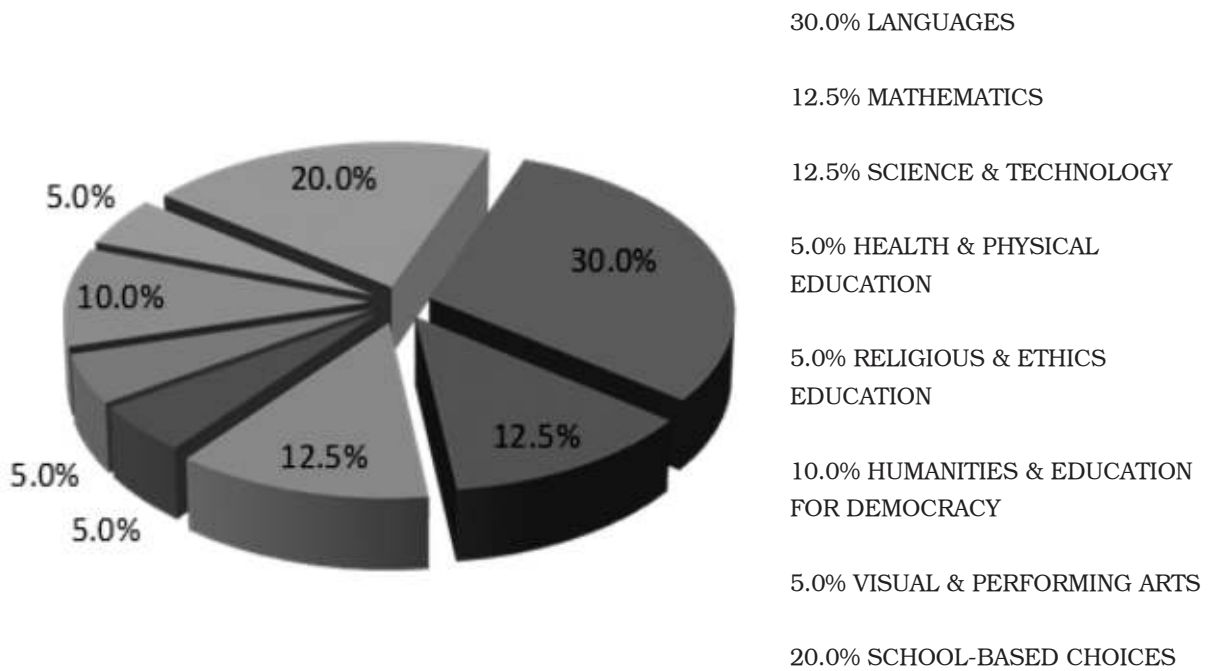ek. During the secondary years, it is recommended that at least 55% of the time is dedicated to Maltese and English, Mathematics, Science and Technology. During the lower secondary years, school-based decisions make up 20% of the curricular time available for learning and teaching. During the senior Secondary Years school-based decisions increase to 25% of the curriculum time available in order to allow for the different realities surrounding the options in the three education sectors.

Transitions

The proposed NCF for the Secondary years ought to prepare students to become life-long learners and thus be motivated towards pursuing their studies in higher and further educational institutions. In addition, the secondary school curriculum should have laid a firm foundation for students to support their future career decisions towards higher and further education paths.

Although the NCF has no jurisdiction on Further and Higher education, it is recommended that a Working Group is set up specifically to consider the smooth transition from secondary to post-secondary and Further and Higher Education.

LEARNING AREAS % DISTRIBUTION - LOWER SECONDARY YEARS CYCLE

30.0% LANGUAGES

12.5% MATHEMATICS

12.5% SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

5.0% HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

5.0% RELIGIOUS & ETHICS EDUCATION

10.0% HUMANITIES & EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY

5.0% VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

20.0% SCHOOL-BASED CHOICES

LEARNING AREAS % DISTRIBUTION - SENIOR SECONDARY YEARS CYCLE

30.0% LANGUAGES

12.5% MATHEMATICS

12.5% SCIENCE & TECHNOLOGY

10.0% HEALTH & PHYSICAL EDUCATION

10.0% RELIGIOUS & ETHICS EDUCATION; HUMANITIES; EDUCATION FOR DEMOCRACY; VISUAL & PERFORMING ARTS

25.0% SCHOOL-BASED CHOICES
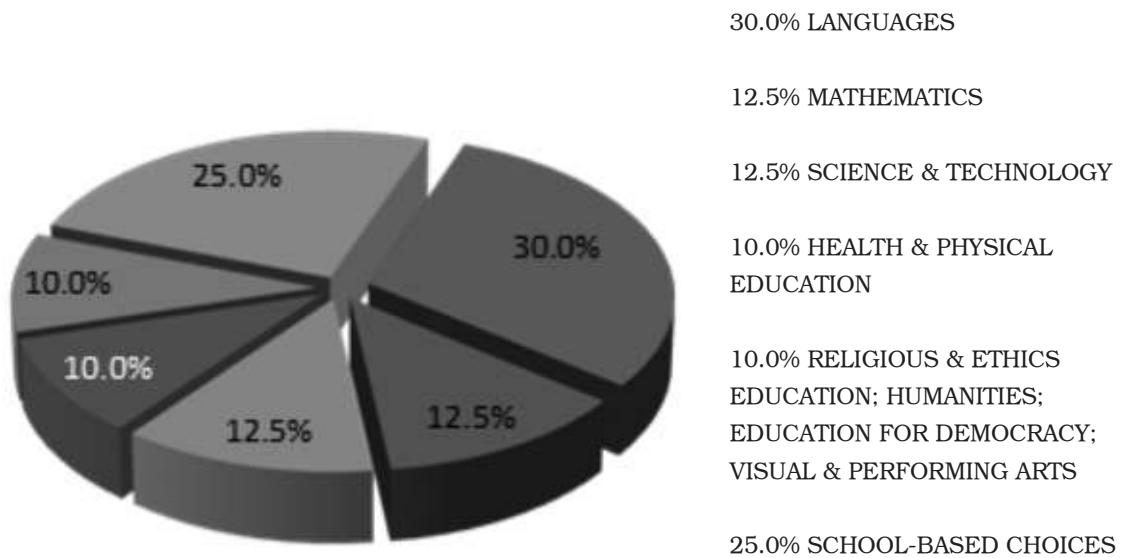
LEARNING OUTCOMES FOR THE SECONDARY YEARS CYCLE
Outcome 1: Learners who are capable of successfully developing their full potential as lifelong 1 earners.
Young people who acquire personal and social skills required to handle an ever changing social reality.
Young people who uphold fundamental democratic values and promote social justice.
Young people who develop a critical, mature and informed outlook of their faith and who respect individuals of different beliefs.
Young people who are able to communicate effectively in at least three languages including Maltese and English.
Young people who are able to apply mathematical and scientific concepts in daily life.
Young people who possess a mastery of literacy, numeracy and digital literacy
Young people who develop an inquiry-based approach to continual learning.
Young people who are able to understand higher order concepts and corresponding underlying principles.
Young people, who are able to think critically and creatively, anticipate consequences, recognise opportunities and are risk-takers.
Young people who participate in the creative use of the expressive arts and engage in aesthetic appreciation.
Young people who are equipped with the necessary qualifications to gain access to further and higher education.
Outcome 2: Learners who are capable of sustaining their chances in the world of work
Young people who are able to communicate confidently and effectively in different social contexts.
Young people who can use and apply a variety of digital technologies.
Young people who are motivated to adapt to the changing needs of society through self-evaluation and on-going training.
Young people who are able to establish and maintain innovative enterprises both individually and in collaboration with others.
Young people who are able to ethically prioritise economic values to ensure stability and autonomy.
Young people who show flexibility and are prepared to deal with job mobility.
Young people who are sensitive to the inter-relatedness of the various spheres of life, groups and individuals.
Young people who are committed towards the improvement of their quality of life and that of others.
Young people who feel empowered in decision-making processes at the various levels of sustainable development.
Outcome 3: Learners who are engaged citizens who are able to secure social justice in constantly changing local, regional and global realities
Young people who value and work in favour of a democratic and inclusive society.
Young people who appreciate and respect the Maltese culture and heritage.
Young people who take pride in the Maltese identity, heritage and language while recognising and respecting others within a Mediterranean, European and globalised context.
Young people who act in favour of the common good, social cohesion and social justice.
Young people who make and adhere to commitments.
Young people who adopt a healthy and active lifestyle and appreciate and know how to make good use of leisure time.

The desired learning outcomes of the NCF will best be gauged at the end of the compulsory Cycle of education of a learner who enters and completes an education system that is consistent with the NCF's Principles and Aims of education. This means that, realistically, the first enrolment of learners in a KGI that reflects the NCF ethos will take place in the scholastic year 2014/2015. A learner who will enter the NCF based education system in 2014/2015 will complete his or her final year of compulsory education under the NCF when he or she completes the final year of his or her Secondary education Cycle (Level 11 (FV)) in the scholastic year 2026/2027.

In essence, therefore, if the education system over the three Cycles of education would have performed and delivered the learning outcomes as planned, then it would be reasonable to assume that the desired outcomes of education would result in the following outputs:

Table 3 : Outcomes of Education 2012 and Targets Set for 2027

	2012	2025/2026
% of 19 year-old students participating in further and higher education excluding Post-Secondary education[24]		40%
% of 17 year-old-students participating in further and higher education	80% +	90%
% rate of Students who obtain 1 to 5 Grade in SEC in any five subjects	66.3%	75%
% rate of Students who obtain the Secondary School Certificate and Profile	0%	95%
% of early School leavers[25]	30% [26]	10%[27]
PISA Literacy (Levels 2 to 6)	63.7%	85%
PISA Mathematical Literacy (Levels 2 to 6)	66.4%	80%
PISA Scientific Literacy (Levels 2 to 6)	67.5%	80%
TIMSS Mathematics (Intermediate to Advanced)	60%	70%
TIMSS Science (Intermediate to Advanced)	48%	60%
SurveyLang		
English (A2-B2)	91%	95%
Italian (A2-B2)	50%	70%

24   Pg21, NCHE Further and Higher Education Statistics 2010, Report of the Survey, National Commission for Higher Education, February 2011
25   Early School leavers is defined to mean persons aged 18 to 24 years of age who have only lower secondary education or less and are no longer in education or training (http://europa.eu/rapit/press-release_MEMO-11-52_en.htm)
26   NSO Estimation, Q2, 2012
27   A learner who enters a NCF based education system in 2013 / 2014 will be 18 years of age in 2027 / 28 and 24 years of age in 2033 / 2034 and hence cannot be an output with regard to Early School leavers output indicator. The Work Group is, however, of the considered opinion that the 10% output target can be reached in 2025 / 2026 with regard to persons who would be 21 years of age. Such a person will enter the Secondary Cycle of education in 2015 / 2016 and his or her journey within the Secondary Cycle of education until he or she completes Year 11 (Form V) in 2019 / 2020 will be fully based on the NCF.

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Appendix I: The Terms of Reference of the Post-Consultation Working Group on the National Curriculum Framework

On 1st August 2012 the Minister for Education and Employment appointed a Working Group with the terms of reference to:

(i)   Assess the feedback received with regard to the draft National Curriculum Framework (NCF).

(ii)   Conclude on the feedback received and make changes as appropriate.

(iii)   Present a Report that takes into consideration the changes adopted and the rationale behind such changes.

(iv)   Present a final NCF document.

The Working Group was tasked to conclude its work by 30th September 2012.

Appendix II: The Constitution of the Working Group on the Post-Consultation National Curriculum Framework

The Working Group is constituted as follows:

Chairperson   Dr James Calleja
Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Employment

Deputy Chairperson   Professor Grace Grima
Director General, Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education, MEDE

Members   Mr Marco Bonnici
Senior Vice President, Malta Union of Teachers

Sister Johanna Gatt OSA
Head of School, Saint Monica School (Church Sector)

Dr Joe Gauci
Head of School, San Anton School (Independent Sector)

Mr Ian Mifsud
Head of School, St Nicholas College, Naxxar Boys Secondary (State Sector)

Mrs Maria Montebello
Head of School, St Ignatius College, Girls Secondary School (State Sector)

Mrs Anita Sciberras
Principal, Gozo College (State Sector)

Professor Valerie Sollars
Dean, Faculty of Education, University of Malta

Mr David Spiteri Gingell
Reviewer of NCF Consultation Feedback, Ministry of Education and Employment

Professor Frank Ventura
Chairman, MATSEC Board

Secretary   Ms Beatrice Mizzi - Office of the Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Education and Employment

Appendix III: The Level Descriptors of the Malta Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning

Level 1 MQF

Level Knowledge

➢ **Level 1 EQF-Basic general knowledge;**

1. Acquires basic general knowledge related to the immediate environment and expressed through a variety of simple tools and contexts as an entry point to lifelong learning;
2. Knows and understands the steps needed to complete simple tasks and activities in familiar environments;
3. Is aware and understands basic tasks and instructions;
4. Understands basic textbooks.

Skills

➢ **(EQF) Basic skills required to carry out simple tasks**

1. Has the ability to apply basic knowledge and carry out a limited range of simple tasks;
2. Has basic repetitive communication skills to complete well defined routine tasks and identifies whether actions have been accomplished;
3. Follows instructions and be aware of consequences of basic actions for self and others.

Competences

➢ **(EQF) Work or study under direct supervision in a structured context**

1. Applies basic knowledge and skills to do simple repetitive and familiar tasks;
2. Participates in and takes basic responsibility for the action of simple tasks;
3. Activities are carried out under guidance and within simple defined timeframes;
4. Acquires and applies basic key competences at this level.

Learning Outcomes

➢ **Knowledge and Understanding**

Has basic knowledge and understanding of textbooks and simple tasks while relating to the immediate environment.

➢ **Applying Knowledge and Understanding**

Follows instructions and completes repetitive simple tasks in familiar contexts and under a quality controlled system.

➢ **Communication Skills**

Communicates basic information in familiar repetitive contexts.

➢ **Judgmental Skills**

Assesses and ensures that assigned tasks have been completed effectively.

➢ **Learning Skills**

Acquires and applies key competences to defined actions.

➢ **Autonomy and Responsibility**

Takes some responsibility for completing simple tasks and exercises limited autonomy.

Level 2 MQF

Level Knowledge

➢ **(EQF) - Basic factual knowledge of a of work or study;**

1. Possess good knowledge of a field of work or study;
2. Is aware of and interprets types of information and ideas;
3. Understands facts and procedures in the application of basic tasks and instructions;
4. Selects and uses relevant knowledge to accomplish specific actions for self and others.

Skills

➢ **(EQF) Basic cognitive and practical skills required to use relevant information in order to carry out tasks and to solve routine problems using simple rules and tools.**

1. Has the ability to demonstrate a range of skills by carrying out a range of complex tasks within a specified field of work or study;

2. Communicates basic information;
3. Ensures tasks are carried out effectively.

Competences

➢ **(EQF) Work or study under supervision some autonomy.**

1. Applies factual knowledge and practical skills to do with some autonomy some structured tasks;
2. Ensures one acts pro-actively;
3. Carries out activities under limited supervision and with limited responsibility in a quality controlled context;
4. Acquires and applies basic key competences at this level.

Learning Outcomes

➢ **Knowledge and Understanding;**

Understands and uses good knowledge for tasks procedures or a field of work or study.

➢ **Applying Knowledge and Understanding;**

Follows instructions and completes a range of well-defined tasks.

➢ **Communication Skills;**

Communicates basic information in unfamiliar contexts.

➢ **Judgmental Skills;**

Selects and uses information for specified tasks and be pro-active.

➢ **Learning Skills**

Acquires and applies key competences to a range of actions.

➢ **Autonomy and Responsibility**

Takes responsibility and exercises autonomy in well-defined tasks under a quality controlled system.

Level 3 MQF

Level Knowledge

➢ **(EQF) Knowledge of facts, principles, processes and general concepts in a field of work or study.**

1. Understands the relevancy of theoretical knowledge and information related to one field of work or study;

2. Assesses, evaluates and interprets facts establishing basic principles and concepts in a particular field of work or study;
3. Understands facts and procedures in the application of more complex tasks and instructions;
4. Selects and uses relevant knowledge acquired on one's own initiative to accomplish specific actions or self and others.

Skills

➢ **(EQF) A range of cognitive and practical skills required to accomplish tasks and solve problems by selecting and applying basic methods, tools, materials and information.**

1. Demonstrates a range of developed skills to carry out more than one complex task effectively and in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts;
2. Communicates more complex information;
3. solves basic problems by applying basic methods, tools, materials and information given in a restricted learning environment.

Competences

➢ **(EQF) Take responsibility for completion of tasks in work or study adapt own behaviour to circumstances in solving in solving problems.**

1. Applies knowledge and skills to do some tasks systematically;
2. Adapts own behavior to circumstances in solving problems by participating pro-actively in structured learning environments;
3. Uses own initiative with established responsibility and autonomy, but supervised in quality controlled learning environments normally within a craftsmanship environment;
4. Acquires key competences at this level as a basis for lifelong learning.

Learning Outcomes

➢ **Knowledge and Understanding;**

Understands theoretical knowledge and information related to complex procedures in a field of work or study.

➢ **Applying Knowledge and Understanding;**

Follows instructions and carries out complex tasks systematically and in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts.

➢ **Communication Skills;**

Communicates complex information in unfamiliar and unpredictable contexts.

➢ **Judgmental Skills;**

Assesses, evaluates and interprets facts related to a field of work or study and applies basic problem solving techniques.

➢ **Learning Skills;**

Acquires and applies key competences as a basis for lifelong learning.

➢ **Autonomy and Responsibility;**

Takes agreed responsibility for completing complex tasks, and interacts with the immediate environment and in defined actions at one's own initiative.

Ministry of Education and Employment