



COUNTRY REPORT ON THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING: MALTA

(March 2011)

This report - as well as the reports from 30 other countries that were represented in the working group on the Adult Learning Action Plan - has been carried out, on behalf of the European Commission, by GHK in cooperation with Research voor Beleid.

This product has been more specifically drawn up on the basis of country-experts' analysis of existing national literature and the Confintea IV-report. In finalising the report, comments and feedback from the National Authority have been taken into account as much as possible; however, the report does not necessarily reflect an official position of the Member State.



CONTENTS

1	CONTEXT	3
1.1	Socio-economic context.....	3
1.2	Historical-ideological context	4
2	POLITICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK	5
2.1	Policies and strategies	5
3	STRUCTURAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK	6
3.1	Structural framework.....	6
3.2	Financial framework.....	7
4	PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LEARNING	8
5	CLUSTERS OF MEASURES	9
5.1	Guidance and counseling	9
5.2	Flexibility	9
5.3	Mobilisation and publicity	10
5.4	Outreach	10
5.5	Financial incentives.....	11
6	THE 5 PRIORITIES OF THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING	11
6.1	Analyse effects of reforms in other educational sectors on adult learning	11
6.2	Improve the quality of provision and staffing	12
6.3	Increase the possibilities to achieve a qualification at least one level higher	12
6.4	Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups.....	13
6.5	Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector.....	13

COUNTRY REPORT ON THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING: MALTA

1 CONTEXT

1.1 Socio-economic context

Malta is densely populated. It has an area of 316 km². The population stood at 413,609 in 2008. 50.2 per cent of this population is female. This figure comprises both Maltese and non-Maltese citizens residing in Malta. U'18 children and youth constitute 21 % of the population while 65+adults constitute 14 %. 30% of the population (122, 408 people) live in the Northern Harbour district which is the largest district in the archipelago that comprises Birkirkara that has 22, 416 residents (5% of the population). The other islands in the Maltese archipelago, namely Gozo and Comino together have a combined population of 31, 432 persons. Malta's population density is now 1309 persons per square kilometre. Projections indicate that the number of persons in the 65+ age bracket is expected to increase to 20 % in 2025 and to 24 % in 2050. Immigration is an important issue. There were 9,033 immigrants in 2008 of whom 5,173 (57 %) were male. 13% of these were returned migrants. Half were EU citizens from another country, while 37 per cent were third-country nationals. With 6,597 having emigrated during 2008, the 'official' net migration figure for the year is 2,436. Naturally, this does not take into account illegal immigrants.

According to provisional estimates, the GDP per capita in 2009 stood at €5.7 billion. There has been a growing structural deficit in public finances that decreased in 2006, only to rise by over 300% in 2008. There has been a growth in private sector employment and especially in part-time jobs while manufacturing jobs have been lost. The biggest shift in the economy has been from manufacturing towards service industry with special emphasis placed on knowledge intensive work especially in ICT, aviation and pharmaceuticals.

Tourism has been the traditional mainstay of the economy from the 60s onward. Gross foreign exchange earnings from tourism registered a decline of 10.3 per cent during the first half of 2009.

In February 2010 the number of registered unemployed was 7,852. 6082 are men while 1770 are female. This marks an increase of 751 persons (10.6%) when compared to the number recorded in February 2009. In September 2009, the unemployment rate for men was 5.6% while that for women stood at 3.5% The rate of unemployment for men stood at 6.7% while that of women stood at 7.1%. Part-time employment as a primary job increased by 1,038 or 3.8 per cent to 28,171 (MFEI, 2009, p. 6). In 2007, the number of men employed part-time as a primary job was 10,151. In October 2009, this figure increased to 11, 449 which constitutes 10.52% of the total number of men employed in a primary job (including those gainfully occupied). In October 2009 the number of women who held a primary part-time job was 16,503. The percentage of part-timers in relation to the total amount of women employed in their primary job is 26.38%.

1.2 Historical-ideological context

Malta's history is one of domination by a variety of rulers including Phoenicians, Romans, the Knights of St John, French (two years) and British. There were noticeable Arab and Sicilian periods during the middle ages. The country achieved its independence from Britain in 1964, became a Republic in 1974 and rid itself of British military bases in 1979. It joined the EU in 2004. .

Adult education's first documented landmarks in Malta occurred during the British colonial period. It reflected a struggle between the demands of an Anglicisation project and the struggle for resistance from Italian-influenced traditional local elite. This is known as the 'language question,' the quest for supremacy of either English or Italian, with Maltese being regarded as the 'kitchen language,' With English gradually becoming the language of administration, education, commerce etc., Maltese gradually also established itself as one of the two most important languages. Despite being the 'national-popular' language, Maltese still suffers from occupying a somewhat subordinate status in various leading institutions in the country. Independence brought with it the development of a tourist industry, the major source of foreign exchange on the island. A laissez-faire mercantilist policy developed in the 60s by the Nationalist Party, which traditionally derived its support from the clerico-professional classes and the class of importers, gave way to sixteen years (1971-1987) of socialist policies under the Labour government led, for the most part, by Dom Mintoff. This was followed by 20 almost uninterrupted years of Nationalist rule, save for a two year 'New labour' interlude brought to an end by a snap election in 1998. This Nationalist administration held a pro-Europe and liberalisation of the economy stance. Privatisation has become an important feature of the economy.

Malta is a non-secular state with Roman Catholicism being recognised as the official religion of the Maltese islands in the country's Constitution.

Throughout most of the 20th century, adult education was linked with emigration (primarily to former British colonies of settlement) and involved literacy education, especially in the English language. Vocational education, often with a strong agricultural bias, was also instrumental in this regard. Adult education was also associated with religious instruction and with social development. Social development was initially often promoted by institutions with a strong Catholic orientation and which followed the social teachings of the Catholic Church. Sporadic socialist initiatives were also to be found in the early part of the 20th century, particularly through the efforts of individuals such as Manwel Dimech. Socialist and labour oriented adult education made its mark in the 80s with the emergence of NGOs connected with the Labour Party and the General Workers' Union. Prior to that we saw the emergence of an academy connected with Christian Democratic politics, strongly linked to the Nationalist Party. Other initiatives such as the Centre for Labour Studies emerged in the early 80s primarily because of the experiments in self -management which the Labour government had introduced. The three main political parties in Malta now established their adult related education Foundations: Fondazzjoni IDEAT affiliated with the Labour Party, the Academy for the Development of a Democratic Environment (AZAD) which is affiliated to the Nationalist Party as well as the Ceratonia Foundation affiliated to the Malta Green Party – Alternattiva Demokratika. Links between local adult education providers and the odd German foundation (stiftung) and other agencies began to occur especially with regard to adult education providers connected with the Church, unions or the main political parties. Trade unions also refined their provisions in adult education, establishing foundations. Malta's accession to the EU brought an increasing interest in adult education as several agencies and individuals began to compete for Grundtvig and Leonardo funding. Following Malta's accession, a number of initiatives in adult education,

especially with regard to employability, began to emerge, relying for the most part on ESF funding. These initiatives are being carried out by both state funded institutions such as the Employment and Training Corporation (ETC) and the Malta College of Arts Science and Technology (MCAST), the Foundation for Educational Services (FES), the Ministry of Education, and NGOs. The university has, for a long period of time, been an important player with regard to credentialed adult education and there have been private agencies providing adult education leading to foreign qualifications, including degrees.

2 POLITICAL AND LEGAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Policies and strategies

The 'EU Memorandum on Lifelong Learning' and other EU recommendations in this field have led the government to appoint a team of people to develop a draft document outlining a National Strategy for Lifelong Learning - an all-embracing strategy for education meant to allow ample space for the development of adult education. This draft document was completed several years ago and was meant to be placed in the public domain to generate a public debate. The draft strategy was however not circulated. Other strategies, regarding adult education, can be gleaned from documents in other areas. These strategies include that proposed by the National Commission for Higher Education in its document 'Further and Higher Education Strategy 2020'. It states that the potential growth in the part-time sector of F& HE can be a source of income for Malta's higher education institutions and that these institutions should be granted full autonomy to establish fees for these courses that would ensure full recovery of cost and profit which would make up for programmes that do not break even. The Commission also urges the Maltese government to assist those who cannot afford such fees through the provision of bursaries. Institutions are urged to adapt programmes to their learners' needs through a learner-centred approach and to promote wider participation and continuing education.

The other guidelines derive from the Ministry for Infrastructure, Transport and Communications (MITC) through its 2010 strategy for the spread of ICT and the creation of a top quality ICT environment. While it does not mention adult and community education explicitly, it mentions strategies to confront the digital divide and "be present in those communities where technologies have still not caught on, finding out why these last pockets persist and walking with community leaders and community members to prop them up while they get used to the pace"

The other important document which provides guidelines for the development of one aspect of adult education is the National Minimum Curriculum document of 2000 (Ministry of Education, 2000). It recommends the development of schools as community learning centres. It calls for use of the community as a learning resource for children during conventional school hours and for the school to be a multipurpose community learning site which provides courses and projects for adults and other community members possibly during and mainly past conventional school hours. However this never really materialised.

2.1 Legal framework

There is no legislation covering adult education in Malta. In fact the Education Act of 1988, recently amended with respect to restructuring in the Ministry of Education and also with regard to Higher Education, mentions adult education only in relation to the functions of the Directorate for Educational Services. As per Government Gazette,

2006 p. A 583, it is stated, in Chapter 327, that the Directorate is to "promote, support, coordinate and ensure lifelong learning services and initiatives, including educational and cultural services within the community, e-learning and distance learning, adult education, evening classes, and other initiatives related to complementary education, etc."

A Directorate for Lifelong Learning (DLLL) was set up in June, 2009. The mission is to design a national strategy in lifelong learning; bring about coordination in this sector by making optimal use of the diverse learning providers and settings which characterises lifelong learning systems; lift the barriers for participation, so that the overall volume of participation in adult learning is increased, and to address the imbalances in participation in order to achieve a more equitable state of affairs; ensure the quality of adult learning; and encourage more adults in active citizenship.

The Directorate for Lifelong Learning administers undergraduate and postgraduate scholarship schemes. A Service Manager was appointed within this Directorate in order to specifically develop the Adult Learning Unit and by late 2010 this Directorate adapted the Action Plan on Adult Learning as set out in the 2006 Communication on adult learning by the European Commission 'it is never too late to learn' into its mission statement.

3 STRUCTURAL AND FINANCIAL FRAMEWORK

3.1 Structural framework

As indicated earlier on, there is no national strategy for adult education in Malta yet. The major players in this area have traditionally included the State, with respect to general education and labour market training, often through two different ministries (education and social policy) but more recently combined under one ministry, namely the Ministry for Education, Employment and the Family. The state provides its own adult education programmes through its Directorate for Lifelong Learning and previously through its Department of Further Studies and Adult Education. This directorate, through its Adult Learning Unit, offers state funded adult education at different levels from adult literacy and basic education to courses leading to matriculation certificates at Ordinary, Intermediate and Advanced levels and at various Malta Qualification Framework levels (in line with the European Qualifications Framework). The over 150 adult courses cover courses in all the key competencies for lifelong learning. The Directorate website indicates the provision of courses for learners who seek to:

- Improve their academic qualifications;
- Seek employment or improve their chances for a better position at work;
- Be able to help their children in their homework or studies;
- Finish off their secondary or post-secondary education;
- Become computer literate;
- Obtain the ECDL certificate;
- Overcome literacy or numeracy problems;
- Learn a craft;
- Pursue some subjects for pleasure;
- Tap their creative resources through Art, Music or Drama

Adult education is also provided by such agencies as the semi-autonomous but state funded Employment and Training Corporation and the Foundation for Educational Services. . The other important player in the field is the Catholic Church through its own provision at national and parish levels as well as through its larger network of NGOs. The rest of adult education is provided by state funded academic institutions especially Higher Education institutions such as the University of Malta and the Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST), private institutions serving as franchise agencies for foreign universities and degree awarding bodies, private (for profit) ICT and language schools, cultural centres connected with a foreign country and its language and culture (e.g. Alliance Française, Circolo Cultural Hispano Maltés, Circolo Dante Alighieri, German Circle), religious institutions (Islamic Centre, Corradino) and, of course, NGOs.

3.2 Financial framework

The State through its annual budget allocations provides funding for services rendered by state institutions in the areas of general adult education, health promotion and vocational education. The EU through its various actions and other sources, notably the ESF, is increasingly becoming a key provider of funds for adult education. In the ESF's case, the emphasis is specifically placed on 'employability'. Corporations such as the ETC benefit from ESF funding. Even before Malta's full accession to the EU in 2004, the ETC was successful in a number of bids. It was successful with six out of the 30 bids submitted in 2003. Other agencies such as the Foundation for Educational Services have been tapping ESF funds. It was through these funds that the FES sought to implement the provision in the NMC document regarding the development of schools as community learning centres. The ESF funded Community-based Lifelong Learning Centres enabled schools to open their doors wider to the community. Funding for this project was subsequently stopped.

As from 2010 the Directorate for Lifelong learning and the Department for Local Government collaborated together to fund and offer adult courses at community level reaching EQF Level 1 in a number of subjects and 1,111 adult learners are participating. Besides Local councils also funded projects carried out at their premises by Maltese adult education NGOs which courses however are not formally recognised by the Malta Qualifications Framework. Apart from these sources of funding, Maltese adult education agencies have little else on which to draw.

There is an emerging private higher education market which caters for adult learners by offering a variety not found in the public university where evening undergraduate courses for adults are provided only in the areas of Theology, Youth Studies, and more recently, Work and Human Resource Development although there is a broader variety at diploma and Master's levels. It was decided at the University's October 2010 Senate meeting, that the University is to introduce a number of evening courses to be taken for credit by members of the general public. Participants can limit themselves to any amount of courses. It is possible, however, for participants to gradually (without any stipulated time frame) accumulate enough credits to obtain a certificate, diploma and a degree (Liberal Arts and Sciences). It seems likely that these courses will be provided on a cost recovery basis although no decisions have as yet been taken in this regard.

The Ministry of Education, Employment and the Family also subsidize courses offered to adult learner attending courses at the performing schools of arts managed by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning, namely the Schools of Arts, Drama and Music.

There are booming industries in the areas of HRD, ICT and the English language (for foreigners). Revenue for these courses is provided through the charging of fees. The state often assists these institutions through the provision of scholarships.

4 PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION IN ADULT LEARNING

Barriers for adult participation in adult education still exist, despite the efforts of government through the creation of a regulatory qualifications framework (the Malta Qualifications Council) and other incentives such as the provision of scholarships for those doing Master's degrees on a part-time basis, often with foreign institutions, and the introduction of the maturity clause for entry to University first degree courses.

The first point to be made in this context concerns the much discussed 'stipends system' which was introduced by the Nationalist Government in 1987 to replace the former wage linked to the 'Worker-Student' scheme in university education. It has been argued that this system of funding discriminates against students on the basis of age since those enrolled in full-time courses, over the age of 30, are excluded from the funding. This measure also fails to take into consideration the needs of people at different ages to continue their studies. The measure is also said to adversely affect persons, usually women, who interrupt their studies because of family concerns, particularly caring for children in their early years. The country also requires expertise in the much-debated area of the Accreditation of Prior Learning and need to generate a culture whereby alternative routes to learning are valorised by institutions of further learning (including the university and MCAST) and society in general, as well as employers.

Evening degree courses are provided and there is likely to be a project that can lead to the acquisition of loose credits in the liberal arts and sciences which can possibly lead to a degree. Evening honours degrees are available in Theology and Youth Studies only and are not available to evening students in other areas. Other barriers include the unavailability of a proper extension service at university and the non-existence of a locally relevant virtual university.

Barriers also arise through the inability of unions to press for paid educational leave in their negotiations with employers. Private old people's homes are mushrooming as the country has an aging population. While they employ nurses, health assistants and the occasional visiting doctor, there are no cultural animators or adult educators available at these homes.

Local councils by and large fail to give pride of place to adult community education in their activities. Some have provided the odd course in ICT in their community or the odd literacy course in concert with an NGO, as indicated previously, but there is little else. The budget for local councils is not sufficient to permit such provision. Local community museums are non-available and they too can serve as a source of lifelong learning.

One of the barriers to adult learning in museums and other cultural centres in these islands is the unavailability of personnel serving as educators in these contexts. There is also a lack of provision of state of the art multimedia libraries in various localities, with well prepared librarians. While the National Curriculum stipulates that schools be developed as community learning centres, little progress has been reported in this regard with few if any schools having been built or restructured to serve as multipurpose community learning sites.

Another barrier to adult learning is the lack of quality and professional approach of the adult educators. 55% of the adult educators who teach in the programmes provided by the Directorate for Lifelong learning do not possess any pedagogical training and 20% of the adult educators are retired teachers (receiving professional development more than 30 years ago) and 0% of the trainers are in possession of a qualification in

andragogy. 25% of the current adult educators employed by the same Directorate are qualified teachers who perform duties during school day hours and teach in adult courses in the evening as part-timers. Research shows that it is more likely that an adult learner invest his/her time to participate in adult courses whose provision is professionally delivered rather than investing time to attend training which do not meet the educational needs of the individual. In such a small community as Malta, the quality and standards of such services is imperative since the word of mouth is the greatest and effective market for adult learning opportunities. On a positive note, the scramble for EU funds is leading to innovative ways of doing adult education in Malta with the potential to provide opportunities for adults of different background to engage in adult education. University has been very much involved in the professional preparation of adult educators first at diploma level and more recently at MA level. This is intended to provide the country with a cadre of well prepared adult educators both in the theoretical and practical aspects of adult education. They have been encouraged to use their imagination in devising projects for their practicum. Furthermore University's initiative to develop flexible pathways to university learning for those who cannot attend the institution on a full time basis, through its proposed Liberal Arts and Science programme, has the potential to increase adult participation in formalised learning.

5 CLUSTERS OF MEASURES

5.1 Guidance and counseling

Guidance and counselling has been in place within the compulsory educational sector as well as in such institutions as the university. However such a professional service is lacking in so far as the educational needs of adults are concerned. Much emphasis has hitherto been placed on school guidance but there seems to be little provision of such facilities with regard to the requirements for further learning for adults. The University has over the last decade introduced a course leading to the diploma in occupational guidance and counselling and this is run by the institution's Faculty of Education and the Centre for Labour Studies. Efforts at providing a service with regard to the educational and training needs of adults have been made by the ETC and MCAST. Other forms of guidance are provided, for example, to immigrants by various NGOs such as the Jesuit Refugee Centre, but this type of provision is not widespread throughout the various sectors of adult learning in Malta and Gozo and no structure exist for such an important provision. The issue of the role of lifelong learning guidance in supporting persistence is crucial. It makes no sense to declare that for instance 500 adult learners registered to learn basic Maltese, English and Numeracy with Numeracy & Literacy courses offered by the Directorate for Lifelong learning in the beginning of the scholastic year 2009-2010 when in actual fact only 300 out of these 500 persisted till the end of the course. So far the Directorate for Lifelong Learning do not yet employ any form of lifelong learning guidance educators. Career and Guidance teachers are engaged with the Director Students Services and hence their role is limited in providing career and guidance services within the compulsory schooling and not to adult learners. Besides the fact that Malta does not have this structure in place, this member state still have to learn from good practice in adult career and guidance which exists in other member states.

5.2 Flexibility

The setting up of a Malta Qualifications Council which evaluates different learning experiences at various levels has the potential to generate greater flexibility in so far as learning pathways are concerned. The University's proposed Liberal Arts and

Sciences evening programme, with courses tailored to the requirements of different adult evening students, also holds promise in terms of providing a more flexible pathway to university continuing education. While the logistics are still to be worked out (it is early days yet), this programme is being presented in a way that would allow persons to take credits across disciplines and whenever they deem fit. They are not tied by a rigid certificate, diploma or degree programme and can accumulate credits in a flexible manner and according to their own preferred time frames. The country's prioritisation of ICT can also prove beneficial to the development of flexible learning at all levels of the educational system and the Strategic Education Pathways Scholarship (STEPS) scheme managed by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning is benefiting students who want to study for a one step higher qualification through a foreign university online degree course. With regard to ETC, persons who claim to have acquired competences on the job, even though they have not had any lessons regarding the trade, have the right to apply to the Employment and Training Corporation to undergo a Trade Test. If they are successful, they are awarded a Certificate of Achievement. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning aims that by 2012 all of the over 500 courses offered to adult learners through Evening Classes, the Lifelong Learning Centre (a second chance school) as well as the Performing Schools of Arts, Drama and Music, will be in-line with the EQF.

5.3 Mobilisation and publicity

The traditional 'tried and tested' methods used are those of engaging a network of potential communication agents in particular localities such as local councils, placing flyers in much frequented places, announcing courses on the media either through Education (the State educational broadcasting station) or through radio adverts. Another traditional means of communication is through parish churches with priests announcing the project at the end of mass, mainly during those mass services attended by the bulk of the locality's community in what is a predominantly Catholic environment. In 1990, A directory of adult education agencies in Malta was produced by the then Department of Education but this was not repeated and therefore updated. However more sophisticated strategies are now being employed. The idea of a Lifelong Learning public display in a much frequented area, as occurs in many other places in Europe and elsewhere, was held in the capital city, Valletta last August, under the auspices of the Ministry of Education's Directorate for Lifelong Learning. Malta lacks a centralised publicly accessible database of adult learning providers and the recording of such statistical information is sporadic.

5.4 Outreach

Established institutions such as the University, MCAST and educational foundations such as those connected with the trade unions engage in little outreach work targeting communities whose members traditionally do not avail themselves of the programmes offered at the central locality. The university has not been targeting communities with low representation in its mainstream and evening courses such as the three cities around the harbour area, traditionally under-represented at university. It's Centre for Labour Studies did engage in such an outreach programme during its initial years but this approach has not been sustained, owing to an exiguous staff. The University has one outreach centre which is located in Gozo and degree, diploma and certificate courses for adults, mainly adults holding a full time job, have been provided there. Its outreach courses in this regard can benefit from the existence at the University's main campus in Malta and the Gozo centre, of teleconferencing facilities. Furthermore, the University also has a programme of Education in Prisons which helped generate educational activities at the state prison in Malta. The University has a very important medium for outreach, namely its Campus FM radio station which

transmits nationally. Very few attempts have been made by this station to provide certified distance learning targeting persons who are not able to attend university and other institutions, especially older adults with mobility impairments, the mobility impaired in general, homemakers, prison inmates etc. There have been very limited local attempts to date in the area of online learning.

An example of good practice in reaching out to adult learners in the community is the current collaboration between the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and the Department for Local Government by offering subsidized courses leading to MQF Level 1 in the community. There are 28 local councils participating in this scheme meaning that there are 104 classes in various subjects; a total of 1,111 adult-learners in the community and increase of 700% on previous years where courses for adults were offered in some local councils without this inter-ministerial collaboration.

5.5 Financial incentives

As far as financial incentives are concerned, adult learners wanting to further their studies post first degree level are eligible to apply for either a Malta Government scholarship or a STEPS (Strategic Education Pathways Scholarship) scholarship. As far as vocational adult education goes, ETC operates a training subsidy scheme whereby employees working in micro-enterprises can apply to ETC to have part of their training costs recovered. Moreover, ETC operates a training grants system. Employers, who train their employees and are eligible for the grant, can apply to ETC to have part of their training costs refunded.

6 THE 5 PRIORITIES OF THE ACTION PLAN ON ADULT LEARNING

6.1 Analyse effects of reforms in other educational sectors on adult learning

Since its inception in June 2009, the Directorate for Lifelong Learning starting taking into consideration the Action Plan on Adult Learning and fully incorporated it by the end of 2010. It was then represented in the Working Group on Adult Learning.

There is no official action plan (National Strategy) for adult learning in Malta yet. The Directorate for Lifelong Learning formulated a green paper with this regards. It is envisaged that a National Policy for Lifelong Learning will be endorsed by the end of 2011. However certain changes being introduced could well have an effect on other sectors. For instance, the existence of a national qualifications framework has the potential to validate, in terms of certification, work carried out in the non-formal sector of education, including adult education. Furthermore the system of STEPS scholarships introduced is enabling adults to pursue courses at one level above that already attained. This is boosting both the public and private sectors in the adult higher educational field and serves to generate a market for the ostensibly private sector of university continuing education to the extent that the demarcation between private and public becomes blurred. It is also boosting the local market for foreign degree granting institutions, enabling Maltese citizens to pursue Master's and doctoral degree courses online and in situ offered by such universities as those of Sheffield, Leicester, Middlesex, Nottingham and London Metropolitan University to name but a few. The areas are business management, human resource development, English studies, computer studies etc. It is too early to analyse whether recognition of prior learning, through the NQF, is having an effect on entry to public and other institutions of higher learning in Malta and Gozo. The provision of full time courses for adults at the Directorate's Lifelong Learning Centre has the potential to enable adults to attain qualifications at ordinary, and advanced levels which can

enable them to pursue courses at higher education institutions. The fact that this is a fulltime learning centre suggests that it is women, not pursuing a full time occupation, and pensioners who benefit from this provision. As from 2010, the basic literacy (Maltese and English Language) as well as numeracy courses for adults are in line with the Malta Qualifications Framework and for the first time a cohort of adult learners attending basic skills courses offered by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning achieved a Certificate of Proficiency MQF Level 1.

6.2 Improve the quality of provision and staffing

Throughout the years, in-service courses for educators engaged in adult education have taken place. Many of these courses have been provided by adult education sections within the ministry of education. Some NGOs have also held occasional sessions and weekend residential seminars for volunteers involved in this sector. The university also held an international lifelong learning summer institute of two days duration with inputs from Maltese and international practitioners and writers in the field (e.g. Professors Peter Jarvis and Margaret Ledwith). A second institute of this kind was meant to be held this year but there were few applications for participation and so the event was called off. The University of Malta has, since 1993, been engaged in providing diploma and degree courses intended to improve the quality of provision and staffing in adult education. Courses leading to the Diploma in Adult Education (three intakes) and to the Diploma in Adult Training and Development (four intakes) were held. There were also M.Ed specialisations in Adult Education. As of 2008, a master's of Arts professional degree in Adult Education has been held and is offered to graduates from all disciplines. It combines theoretical and practical aspects. Both the diploma and the MA courses had a practical component consisting of two practicum sessions, one each year. The MA students can specialise either in 'adult education and the community' or in 'adult training and development.' The Directorate for Lifelong Learning is also insisting that an andragogy course leading to MQF Level 5 (higher Diploma) be provided to practitioners involved in adult education and prospective adult educators. An ESF application under the Cohesion Policy 2007-2013 (Operational Programme II) was submitted by the end of 2010. Moreover, the National Reform Programme 2009 states that "The Directorate for Lifelong Learning will also embark on a programme to train the trainers and have all teachers and trainers employed in this sector certified or are in possession of a better qualification in adult teaching by 2015."

The General Workers Union, the country's largest union, has, through its adult education wing (the Reggie Miller Foundation), participated in a EU project called Vinepac. The project culminated in the production of a handbook for the validation of psycho-pedagogical adult educator's competences. The Union worked hard at disseminating this handbook among various adult education providers and this was intended to help improve practitioners' practice. The Faculty of Education, through its Adult Education Programme, drew inspiration from this handbook to provide a checklist for visiting tutors and prospective adult educators on the practicum. This checklist indicates some of the competences, skills and attitudes that adult educators can develop when engaging in the task of teaching adults.

6.3 Increase the possibilities to achieve a qualification at least one level higher

There is a dearth of statistics being gathered with regard to participation in non-formal education and training, including training taking place on the job alongside experienced hands. Many would not even regard this as 'education' despite the learning that is taking place. As for formal education and training, the setting up of MCAST and the provision of university continuing education, with the limitations underlined earlier, and the presence of institutions providing access to online and

foreign degrees increase the possibilities of achieving a qualification at least one level higher than that already obtained. A number of incentives are being provided, such as eligibility for scholarships for Master's degrees and stipends for first degrees provided by foreign institutions (via local private agencies) as well as local ones. No fees are charged to full time students attending local public higher education institutions (this also applies to foreign students from the EU) and this is also an incentive for Maltese adults who attend these institutions full time, though they would not receive a stipend past their 30th birthday. As indicated earlier, the STEPS scholarship is one of the main vehicles to increase the possibility of achieving a qualification one step higher than that already obtained. This is now being extended beyond doctoral studies to also include postdoctoral studies. The website of the National Commission for Higher Education indicates that "STEPS provides grants for tuition and subsistence for full-time programs at Master (6.000 EUR annually) or Doctorate level (8.500 EUR annually) in Malta or abroad. Higher grants are available for studies in priority areas namely Information and Communication Technology and Science and Technology, which are granted 13.000 EUR annually for Master programs and 22.000 EUR annually for Doctorates. Part-time and distance Master programs are also funded through STEPS. Support is granted towards tuition expenses only and for the entire duration of the course. A travel allowance is available for those studying abroad, and additional support is available for spouses travelling with scholars, for children and for Gozo residents studying in Malta.

The fact that Adult Basic Skills courses and other courses offered by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning are being incorporated in the EQF, this means that adult learners can now make a clearer progression from one level to the next.

6.4 Speed up the process of assessing and recognising non-formal and informal learning for disadvantaged groups

The setting up of a Malta Qualifications Council (MQC) provides opportunities for prior learning assessment and recognition. The MQC has made the validation of formal and non-formal learning one of its primary concerns. In its document, 'A National Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning; A Second Guide' (MQC, 2007), the Council states "Informal and Non-formal education and training as well as the recognition of prior learning (RPL) will eventually form part of the national qualifications framework for lifelong learning." With regard to ETC, persons who claim to have acquired competences on the job, even though they have not had any lessons on the trade, have the right to apply to the Employment and Training Corporation to undergo a Trade Test. If they are successful, they are awarded a Certificate of Achievement.

6.5 Improve the monitoring of the adult learning sector

Attempts were made to provide some coordination of the broad and amorphous adult education sector in 1989 and 1991 as well as in 1997. The idea was to create an adult education network for Malta and Gozo. These attempts were sporadic and not sustained throughout. In 1997 a compendium of chapters on different aspects of adult education, entitled *Beyond Schooling: Adult Education in Malta*, was published. Furthermore, different aspects of adult education provision constitute the subject of degree level dissertations ranging from undergraduate dissertations in education to master degree dissertations in sociology and education. There are also projects underway which can lead to dissertations at the level of a Ph.D. Most of the monitoring therefore consists of research studies at various levels. Areas covered include those of prison education, adult literacy, adult education and work, workers' education, education of older adults, religious adult education, community education, university continuing education, adult education and television, adult education and

women, adult education and museums, adult education and health. There is however no national agency to monitor adult education and provide assistance in the area of improving the quality of adult education provision throughout Malta and Gozo, such as for instance a national institute for adult and continuing education. Most of the monitoring takes place in specific segments of the adult education sector, primarily in the area of state sponsored adult education. In the case of the many programmes offered by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning, this is carried out through 'on the spot' visits by officials from the Directorate itself as well as through the submission of attendance records from personnel at the various centres involved in the Directorate's programmes. Since the engagement of the Education Officer (Adult Education) within this Directorate in 2008, adult educators applying to teach adult learners has to undergo a rigorous interview after a public call for such posts and continuous professional development in this sector are used for reflection on the good practice in this field as well as in assessment tools and procedures in order to validate adult courses in line with the European Qualification Framework.