National strategy

In 2014, the framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024[1] was launched which aligns all sectoral education strategies and policies, and has four broad but measurable targets in line with European and world benchmarks and that set the education agenda in Malta:

- reduce the gaps in educational outcomes, decrease the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence;
- support educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school-leavers;
- raise levels of student retention and attainment in further, vocational, and tertiary education and training; and
- increase participation in lifelong learning and adult learning.

This framework offers focus and direction for other policy documents, such as the National Curriculum Framework[2], National Literacy Strategy for All in Malta and Gozo[3], a Strategic Plan for The Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta[4], the Higher Education Strategy for Malta[5], the National Vocational Education and Training Policy[6] and the Malta National Lifelong Learning Strategy[7]. Measures that are already in place and others set to be initiated are aimed to reach across all socio-economic sectors and different cultural, ethnic, religious, gender and sexual status. While acknowledging that out-of-school factors like poverty and social exclusion affect student
achievement, the Ministry is seeking to improve students’ learning experiences by encouraging creativity, critical literacy, entrepreneurship and innovation at all levels. Objectives falling within compulsory education are set to be achieved through the provision of a relevant curriculum built on a learning outcomes approach and a variety of learning experiences and qualifications pegged to the Malta Qualifications Framework. On the other hand different pathways and opportunities to increase the relevance of learning to the labour market will be increased during post-compulsory education and training. This Framework thus aims to contribute towards a society that is competent, resourceful, critically conscious, and competitive in a global economy driven by information, knowledge and innovation.

Two national strategies stemming from the above framework that address ELET are:

- A Strategic Plan for The Prevention of Early School Leaving In Malta and;

The first strategy document, a Strategic Plan for The Prevention of Early School Leaving In Malta [4] has a time-frame for this document which is 2014 – 2020. This Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving in Malta aims at facilitating focused action that will support students to make the best out of their school years, from early childhood to the end of compulsory school and beyond. The aim is to enable students to develop their potential as human beings, as citizens and as stakeholders in the economy. This strategic plan caters for prevention, intervention and compensation measures so it targets early years, primary years, middle school, secondary school and upper secondary (post compulsory) thus the age is not up to 16.

The actions outlined in this strategic plan are in line with the Framework for the Education Strategy for Malta 2014-2024 that centres around four measurable targets that both individually and collectively contribute directly towards the reduction of the number of early school leavers in Malta. The Framework highlights the need for Malta to reduce the gaps in educational outcomes between boys and girls and between students attending different schools. It aims at decreasing the number of low achievers and raise the bar in literacy, numeracy, and science and technology competence while increasing student achievement. Another measurable target to achieve is the provision of support in educational achievement of children at-risk-of-poverty and from low socio-economic status, and reduce the relatively high incidence of early school leavers. A third target put forward by the Framework is to raise levels of student retention and attainment in further and higher education, followed by another target to increase participation in lifelong learning. These four measurable targets form the basis of the present document. The document a Strategic Plan for The Prevention of Early School Leaving In Malta envisages structures that enable stakeholders to monitor implementation for the purpose of revising plans when the need arises, with the specific target of keeping on track in the quest for providing a more meaningful and successful educational experience for all students. The Early School Leaving Strategy is currently being revised on the basis of evidence-based monitoring, assessments and evaluation that have taken place. The revision process will be complete by 2017-2018.

of both strategies. The National Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta 2020 focuses on adult learning, specifically the participation of people aged 25 to 64 years in lifelong learning. It embraces post-compulsory education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), higher education, and adult education. The Lifelong Learning Strategy consolidates and builds on ideas and processes already taking shape in different organisations and institutions in Malta, such as to ensure a single, coherent place to guide actions in lifelong learning. All applicants must be sixteen years of age or over, if not stated otherwise in certain specific sections or Centres.

The Strategic objectives of this document are

- Stimulate participation in lifelong Learning by Maltese adults by creating a demand and a desire for learning. This latent demand does not lie solely among those with low-skills and at risk of poverty and social exclusion, but also among people in employment who wish to further their skills set and job mobility.
- Place the ‘learner’ at the centre by optimising all possible types of innovative learning methods and environments to make learning flexible, personal, accessible and relevant. This implies a commitment to alternative pathways, beyond those defined by formal learning.
- Improve skills sets that contribute to professional development, employment mobility and active citizenship.
- Develop support structures for adult learning.
- Improve governance in the Lifelong Learning sector, exploring structural, institutional, fiscal, legal, political and administrative measures available.

The Lifelong Learning Strategy has 10 strategies supporting the 5 Lifelong Learning objectives. These strategies are fundamentally inter-related and inter-dependent. Strategies are broadly measures to empower, connect and value learning acquired in different tracks (e.g. Vocational Education and Training and higher education) and settings (formal, non-formal, informal learning) and to improve guidance.

- Coordinate delivery of Lifelong Learning by public organisations
- Promote Adult Skills and VET as the optimum, flexible route to employability, personalised professional development and economic well-being
- Develop a coherent, equitable and sustainable accreditation system for adult learning
- Improve the overall quality of adult learning in Malta and Gozo
- Embrace emergence of Open Education Resources as opportunity for Connected Learning
- Facilitate women’s participation in workplace through Lifelong Learning
- Lever on Lifelong Learning to support inclusivity & empower marginalised communities
- Improve the quality of life of older people through Lifelong Learning opportunities
- Coordinate ownership and delivery of Community Learning
- Raise awareness of Greener living as a core component of Lifelong Learning

The National Lifelong Learning Strategy for Malta 2020 focuses on adult learning, specifically the participation of people aged 25 to 64 years in lifelong learning. The strategy was published for consultation in November 2014 and adopted as final in January 2015. It embraces post-compulsory education, Vocational Education and Training (VET), higher education and adult education. The Lifelong Learning Strategy consolidates and builds on ideas and processes already taking shape in
different organisations and institutions in Malta, to ensure a single, coherent focus and framework to guide actions in lifelong learning.

The strategy addresses a number of challenges including:

- Low level of participation of adults in adult learning
- Early school leavers and low skills achievement
- Low number of women actively at work or engaged in lifelong learning
- Intergenerational cycle of disengagement from education

In February 2015, a task force was set up to monitor the implementation of the strategy. The task force includes representatives from the Directorate for Lifelong Learning, the University of Malta, the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE), Jobsplus, Foundation for Educational Services and Malta College for Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST). The task force meets on a regular basis and takes stock of progress on the implementation of the 40 strategy programmes. The task force has also set up 3 working groups to focus on specific adult learning aspects: community learning and vulnerable groups; employment and accreditation; and connected learning.

The task force consolidated and eliminated duplication in provision to eliminate operational overlaps related to lifelong learning courses. It also submitted an action plan to the Ministry for Education and Employment with the objective of separating lifelong learning policy and strategy functions from the actual delivery of courses. Main initiatives in the implementation of the strategy include also the setting up of the National Skills Council in 2016 and the establishment of the Department for Arts, Adult Education and Open Communities within the Faculty of Education at the University of Malta.

**Formal education: main policy measures on ELET**

ESL Prevention, Intervention and Compensation measures are available in the [Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Early School Leaving In Malta](#)

Prevention measures that have been implemented so far to prevent early school leaving, supporting young people to stay in school, and offering opportunities to early leavers for re-entering education include:

- The launching of the [Free Childcare Scheme](#), with more than 90 childcare centres registered with the scheme.
- The setting up of the Cultural Integration Unit to facilitate the integration of the increasing number of foreign students in school communities.
- A rewriting of all school programmes at compulsory level using a Learning Outcomes approach and which are currently being negotiated with relevant stakeholders.
- The introduction of co-education at secondary level.
- A sustained investment in educational technology including the phasing in of tablet technology in primary schools.
- The introduction of VET subjects as part of mainstream secondary education.
- More investment in transition processes between one educational stage and another in order to increase student retention at all levels of education.
- The involvement of parents in the education of their children, particularly in programmes
implemented by the National Literacy Agency [10].

- The setting up of the Institute for Education [11] which started operating in 2015 with the aim of providing CPD for educators and educational leaders in order to equip them with the skills to deal with the challenges of providing a meaningful educational experience to all students.

Intervention measures to prevent early school leaving, supporting young people to stay in school, and offering opportunities to early leavers for re-entering education include;

- a more focused monitoring of students’ attendance through a data management system (the E1 platform) that serves as an early warning system that triggers off intervention processes by psychosocial professionals,
- recruiting of more psychosocial professionals to give a more focused service in the schools,
- more awareness about the contribution that youth workers can make to motivate students to learn, as well as the recruitment of youth workers to offer services within day-schools and programmes at lower and upper-secondary level,
- the development of special services in primary and secondary schools for students with Social, Emotional and Behavioural Difficulties (SEBD),
- the development of a number of programmes by the National Literacy Agency aimed at both students and their families,
- the setting up of the Alternative Learning Programme to offer an applied-learning oriented programme for vulnerable students in their final year of compulsory school who were in danger of dropping out,
- the introduction of modular programmes for vulnerable students in secondary schools, such as the Prince’s Trust International’s XL Programme [12].

Compensation measures to prevent early school leaving, supporting young people to stay in school, and offering opportunities to early leavers for re-entering education include;

- The setting up of the Foundation Certificate Programme [13] at MCAST and a similar programme at ITS both aimed at students who leave compulsory education without the necessary qualifications but who are keen on continuing with their education,
- The setting up of a new school for students who leave compulsory schooling without the necessary entry qualifications, but who would like to have a second opportunity to follow the academic route, GEM 16+ [14], which was set up in September 2015,
- The implementation of academically-oriented second chance programmes in the two other further education institutions of the Ministry,
- The development of a VET oriented second-chance programme run by the national youth agency using a youth-work approach in order to offer training to young adults and facilitate their transition to employment,
- Second chance programme offered by the Foundation for Social Welfare Services of the Ministry for Family and Social Solidarity targeting vulnerable young people,
- A well-developed part-time adult education programme currently run by the Directorate for Lifelong Learning and Early School Leavers and also a VET-oriented part-time adult education programme offered by MCAST,
- At least three entities belonging to the Ministry for Education offer second chance programmes for young persons with disability.
- Jobsplus, the Public Employment Service (PES), is also using ESF funds earmarked for the Youth Guarantee \[15\] in order to fund programmes specifically aimed at vulnerable young people who include students who need to re-sit for the Secondary Education Certificate examinations that would enable them to progress further in their educational path, and also programmes aimed at NEETs, through the NEET Activation Scheme.

**Addressing ELET through non-formal and informal learning and quality youth work**

The **Youth.inc** \[16\] programme is an inclusive education programme, based on applied learning, for young people between the age of 16 and 21. The aim of the programme is to help young people to improve their standard of education and gain more knowledge, values and skills to enter the labour market or gain qualifications to continue in further education and/or training. Youth.inc is under the remit and management of Aġenzija Żgħażagħ, which adopts a more youth-centred approach and seeks to strengthen the complementary role of formal and non-formal learning. The programme has a strong youth work component and all young people attending the programme are assigned to a youth worker who works with them on a daily basis. The project is divided into five main areas: basic skills courses, work placement, vocational courses, activities, life skills programme. Once a week young people have a whole day dedicated to Life Skills programme where through the engagement with a qualified youth worker, they can benefit from the youth work approach.

The **Youth Hubs** \[17\] area non-formal education service provided by Aġenzija Żgħażagħ in higher education institutions. Youth Hubs offer an informal and recreational environment where young people can develop projects and initiatives with the support of youth workers, that build their personal and social skills and improve their educational and employment opportunities.

The **Youth Village** \[18\] provides space, facilities and supports for young people and youth organisations to stage events and initiatives. The Youth Village aims to create a physical, and learning environment that will attract both young people and youth organisations.

**Cross-sector coordination and monitoring of ELET interventions**

The Early School Leaving Unit has three ESL Working Groups that include representatives of various entities within and outside the Ministry for Education and Employment, that may contribute to the reduction of the ESL phenomenon. These groups will be rescheduled on finalisation of the ESL strategic plan’s revision.

The **Compulsory Education Working Group** consists of representatives from:

- the 10 Colleges -1 representative from each of the 10 Primary and Secondary Education Colleges
- Church and Private Schools
- the ALP Resource Centre, Paola
- the Department for Student Services (DSS)
- the VET Department
- the Quality and Assurance Department
- the Institute for Education

The **Post-Secondary Education Working Group** consists of representatives from:

- Malta College for Art, Science and Technology (MCAST)
- Junior College
- Giovanni Curmi Higher Secondary School, Naxxar
- Sir Mikiel Ang Refalo Sixth Form, Gozo
- GEM 16+
- Aġenzija Żgħażagħ
- Dun Manwel Mallia Resource Centre, Wardija
- ALP+
- Institute for Tourism Studies
- Youth Guarantee

The **Inter-ministerial Committee** consists of representatives from:

- Ministry for Gozo
- Ministry for EU Affairs and Equality
- Ministry for Finance
- Ministry for Health
- Ministry for the Family, Children's rights and Social Solidarity (through FSWS)
- Ministry for Economy, Investment and Small Businesses
- Ministry for Tourism
- Ministry for Justice, Culture and Local Government

The ESL Working Groups have the responsibility of:

- determining, coordinating and monitoring services that address the needs of children and young people who are disengaged or at risk of disengaging in specific local conditions;
- ensuring that pro-active preventive measures are in place;
- identifying the need for professional development of school administrators, teachers, psycho-social professionals and others working with children and young people at risk;
- facilitating the establishment of parents, family and community networks that would work with schools to intervene and prevent ESL;
- establishing support mechanisms that parents, families and carers may require to better support children or young persons;
ensuring that this is done in a concerted and mutually supportive manner, especially when the services are being given by entities that fall within the same Ministry and aiming to reach connected cohorts of students.