Quality assurance as specified by Chapter 327 of the Laws of Malta, the Education Act [1], establishes that the Directorate for Quality and Standards in Education (DQSE) is required to establish, regulate, assure and monitor standards and quality in education of all the schools attended by students of compulsory school age, irrespective to which sector they pertain to. Such reviews are required so as to guarantee optimum quality especially in terms of educational programmes and services and of operations. Two departments within DQSE and another under the Office of the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry for Education and Employment are responsible for ensuring quality education in schools. These are:

- The Quality Assurance Department [2] (QAD)
- The Department of Curriculum Management [3] (DCM)
- The Research and Development Department [4] (RDD)

Policies are co-ordinated between the Directors General of the various education directorates together with the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry for Education and Employment.

The Quality Assurance Department (QAD)

The Quality Assurance Department incorporates within it the Internal [5] and External Review [6] sections (School Improvement [7]) and the Education Regulatory Compliance Section [8]. All these three sections have established essential basic standards and practices.

The internal review

During the course of the school year each school carries out an internal self-evaluation so as to ensure that the principles established in the National Curriculum Framework are being followed and that good practices are being promoted.

The internal self-evaluation is an autonomous exercise which falls under the responsibility of the school’s Senior Management Team (SMT). Key stakeholders, namely the school’s management and educational staff, pupils, the School Council, the Students’ Council, parents as well as the local community are recommended to be involved in the internal review process. During the internal self-evaluation process, priorities are established and action plans with SMART objectives are drawn up for these to be followed during the following school year through a School Development Plan (SDP). These targets are then reflected upon and evaluated at the end of each school year.

Guidance in carrying out the internal self-evaluation and SDP document is provided by QAD members.
of staff including Education Officers and Assistant Directors. A focal person has been assigned to each state college to assist in this process, which process is also carried out in Church and Independent Schools.

The School Development Plan and the report drawn up following the conclusion of the school’s internal evaluation exercise are then forwarded to QAD.

The external review

Through the external review structure, the QAD is committed to promote within schools a culture of consistence, excellence and rigour. The way to achieve these standards could be different for each school and college guaranteeing individual holistic development whilst providing opportunities to celebrate diverse good practices. External reviews also take place in early childhood educational settings where attendance is not compulsory.

Review Guidelines are disseminated so that all teachers and school administrators have a clear understanding of the review parameters. The QAD, through the review process, looks for the potential of growth that each school has. This is done through observing the planning, the implementation processes and the self-evaluation exercises occurring within schools.

Throughout the review process, the focus is on three main key areas, namely:

- School leadership and management;
- Teaching and learning;
- School climate.

All the other reviewed elements are placed against this backdrop so as to enhance these three key educational aspects. It is to be noted that the review is intended to assess the quality of teaching taking place and not individual teachers thus clarifying that the review does not have a teacher appraisal function. Rather it is ensuring that each learner gets the best educational experience.

A review timeline is in place as to how review procedures are carried out, including initial school notification, dissemination of questionnaires to teaching staff and parents, school observations during the review week and dissemination of findings.

The Education Regulatory Compliance section

The Education Regulatory Compliance Section (ERCS) is particularly responsible for the Non-State Educational Sector, namely Church Schools, Independent Schools, International Schools and Independent Summer Clubs. The main functions of this section are to:

- Regulate and ensure compliance on the part of Non-State Schools;
- Register new schools and summer clubs;
- Approve the appointment of all staff recruited by Church Schools;
- Approve the appointment of learning support assistants (both regular and those on a supply basis) and confirm teaching staff in Independent and International Schools;
- Ensure that all schools follow the National Curriculum Framework and adhere to the National Minimum Conditions as outlined in the Education Act of 1988 (amended in 2007), and the related legal notices.
The teacher induction process

An essential element of quality assurance is the induction process for newly recruited teachers. A teacher induction policy was launched by the QAD for the state sector. The Education Act requires that all graduate teachers undergo two years of supervised experience in a registered school to be eligible for a Permanent Teachers' Warrant.

The induction process is considered an essential initial process for teachers to gain the necessary guided practical experience after following theoretical preparation during their studies. This induction process is in fact intended to facilitate the full integration of new teachers so as to become effective and successful professionals.

The induction of newly recruited teachers runs in parallel with the probation period. Throughout these two years newly qualified teachers (NQTs) are expected to focus primarily on developing key professional knowledge, attitudes and skills required to become successful reflective practitioners within the education system.

During their induction process NQTs are required to:

- Participate in a three-day Induction Seminar held before the beginning of the school year;
- Keep a Personal Reflective Journal;
- Attend a group mentoring session with the College Principal as mentor;
- Attend for two formal meetings with the mentor during school hours;
- Attend for a concluding seminar at the end of the school year organised by the College Principal in collaboration with QAD.

Ongoing training is provided for Education Officers, Heads of School, Assistant Heads, Heads of Department and prospective Teacher Mentors. This training programme has been accredited by the National Commission for Further and Higher Education (NCFHE) as a transferable Contributing Professional Development Award in Level 6 of the Malta Qualifications Framework.

It is also envisaged that any other officers and employees within the Directorates, Colleges and schools could request to be mentored at any time in their career for guidance, support and/or encouragement as required by them.

Performance Management and Programme Development Programme

The Performance Management Programme is established throughout the Maltese civil service. This has been modified for teachers into a Performance Management and Professional Development Programme (PMPDP) which intends to be a tool for teacher appraisal whilst also enhancing the individual professional development component of teachers.

With regards to professional development, all teachers have a statutory requirement to attend an annual in-service course as part of their continuous professional development. This is intended to further reinforce the after-school Professional Development Sessions held at school level. Through the PMPDP, it is intended that each educator will identify those training needs and match these to the available training provision. Such a prerequisite will guarantee that education staff achieve the required knowledge, skills, attitudes and competences. All newly qualified teachers are required to have a PMPDP. The possibility of introducing a similar programme during the probationary period of teachers who are on a supply basis is currently being explored.
Subject review

The Director General (DQSE) can direct the QAD to review the teaching and learning of either a subject within state schools or a specific area of concern. In 2014, the area under review was "Maximising Learning Time". When subjects are examined, the curricular practices, modes of assessment, and teaching and learning pedagogies are reviewed to analyse whether these are in line with the National Curriculum Framework [14].

The Department of Curriculum Management

The key areas falling under the remit of the Department of Curriculum Management (DCM) are curriculum management, student assessment, classroom support related to teaching and learning, provision of textbooks and teacher training. The Assessment for Learning [15] unit provides support for teachers in the area of teaching and learning through formative assessment procedures. The Educational Assessment Unit (EAU) also monitors national levels of achievement through national benchmarks, end-of-year examinations and moderation of school-based assessment (that is carried out by subject Education Officers).

Quality assurance in schools is also carried out by Education Officers who are responsible for monitoring the teaching and learning of a subject, mainly through classroom visits. Reviews are also carried out at a number of key phases in a teacher’s career, namely after a period of two years from graduation when teachers are confirmed and awarded a Permanent Teacher’s Warrant and then every eight years when teachers progress from one salary scale to the next.

Further feedback and evaluation is arrived at when national annual examinations are held in the last three years of primary school and then throughout secondary education. An assessment is obtained after examining the students’ results which are monitored and moderated by the Education Officers in collaboration with the Heads of Department.

The Research and Development Department (RDD)

The Research and Development Department [4] is involved in the strategic planning, research and data gathering activities that are an essential prerequisite when formulating policies and strategies at Ministerial level. The department puts forward and develops proposals with regard to new research themes and strategies in collaboration with members of the Education Directorates’ Senior Management Team and other research institutions, at the national, European and international levels. It is also involved in new projects that facilitate the dissemination of data among State schools and colleges.

It is also responsible for international exchange and the sharing of information on educational issues, particularly with EU bodies such as the Eurydice Network. The department has been responsible for the management and implementation in Malta of the following international studies:

- The Trends in International Mathematics & Science Study (TIMSS) that tests the mathematical and scientific competences attained by Year 5 and Year 9 students (2007, 2011 and 2015);
- The Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS) surveys teachers and schools about their working conditions and the learning environments. TALIS aims to provide valid, timely and comparable information to help countries review and define policies for developing a high-
quality teaching profession (2008);
- The International Civic and Citizenship Study (ICCS) testing students’ knowledge and understanding of concepts and issues related to civics and citizenship, as well as their value beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours (2009 and 2016);
- The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) involving 15-year-olds at the end of compulsory education (2009+ and 2015);
- The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) that assesses nine-year-old students for the level of reading literacy they achieve (2011 and 2016);
- The European Survey on Language Competences (SurveyLang) testing the level of competences of Maltese students in English and Italian as foreign languages (2012).